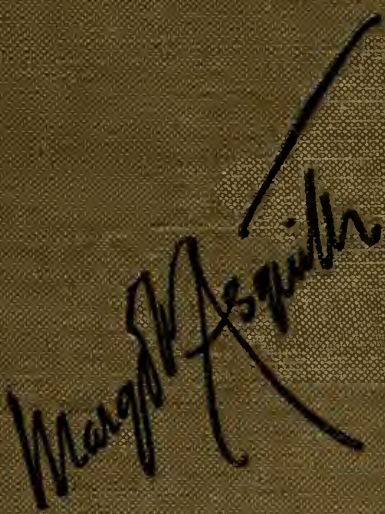

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THE AUTO-BIOGRAPHY OF MARGOT ASQUITH

MRS. ASQUITH

Photo. Hoppé

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MARGOT ASQUITH

Volume II

Les chiens aboyent, la caravanne passe—*Persian Proverb*

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PSALM XXXIX.

5. Verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity.

6. Surely every man walketh in a vain shew: surely they are disquieted in vain: he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them.

7. And now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in Thee.

I
DEDICATE THIS BOOK
TO
MY HUSBAND

What ? Have you not received powers, to the limits of which you will bear all that befalls ? Have you not received magnanimity ? Have you not received courage ? Have you not received endurance ?

EPICTETUS

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PREFACE

In the first volume of my life I dealt as faithfully as I could with my youth, my home, my family, my education, my friends and the episodes that led up to my marriage. In this final volume I have confined myself to chronicling the political events and incidents connected with them which took place under my own observation, finishing with the Armistice and General Election of 1918.

I have nothing to complain of in the reception by the public of my first volume, though most of the reviewers abused me: I should not have written about the living; it was unpardonable to criticise the dead; bad taste to publish letters; worse to mention love; and, to crown the crescendo, egotistical to write about myself. As these criticisms were directed more against myself than my art, I was not discouraged from finishing this second and final volume.

After Lord Crewe's personal sorrow, I felt I could not trouble him with my MS. and, our dear friend Mr. Teixeira de Mattos having died, I asked Mr. Masterman to look over my proofs.

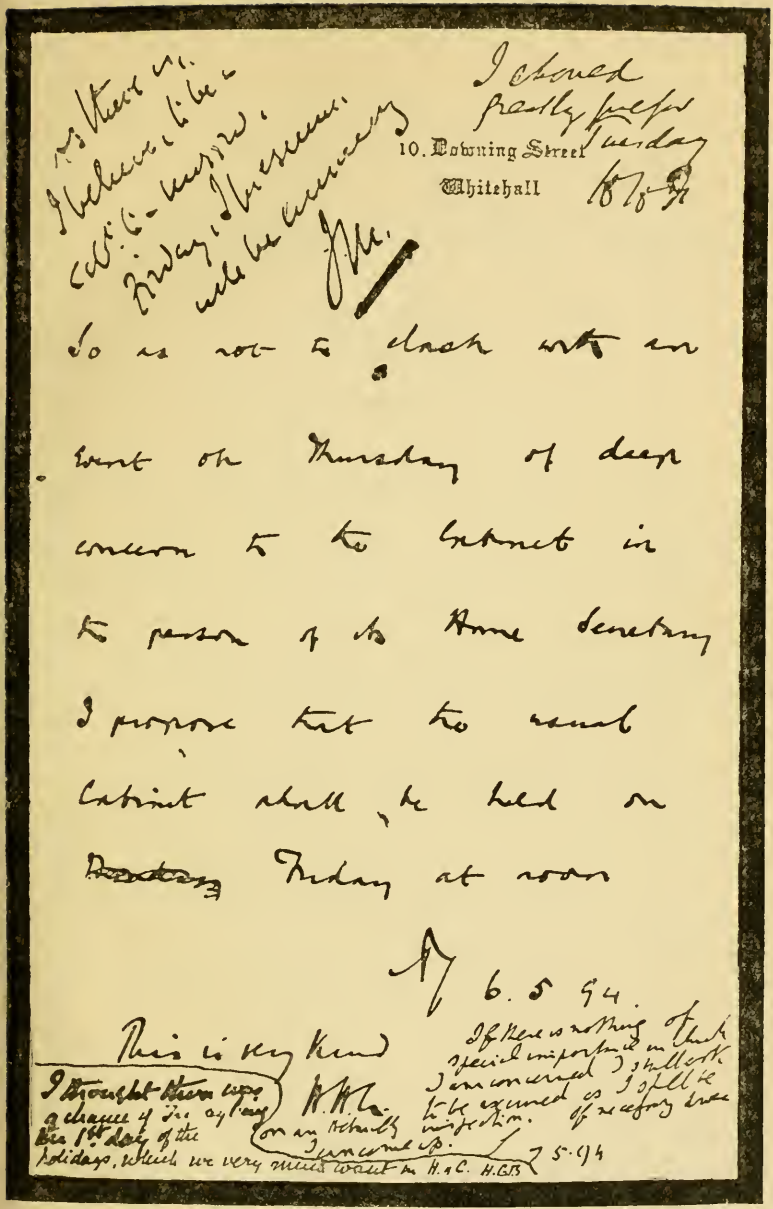
I can never adequately thank him for the ungrudging time he spent on me or the care he took in going through these pages. I wish also to thank Mr. Desmond McCarthy for suggestions, Mr. John Murray for kind permission to reprint Chapter II from the *Cornhill Magazine*, and the City Typewriter Company, Oxford, for their courtesy, efficiency and promptness.

At the suggestion of my son-in-law, Prince Antoine Bibesco, I select for the motto of this final volume a Persian proverb :

" Les chiens aboyent, la caravanne passe."

MARGOT ASQUITH.

1922.



I should greatly prefer Tuesday 10/8/94

10. Downing Street
Whitehall

So as not to clash with an event on Thursday of deep concern to the Cabinet in the person of its Home Secretary I propose that the usual Cabinet shall be held on ~~Monday~~ Friday at noon

6.5.94.

This is very kind

H.H.A.

I thought there was a chance of Tu. sp'ing the 1st day of the holidays, which we very much want in H. & C. H.G.B.

If there is nothing of special importance in which I am concerned I shall ask to be excused as I shall be inspection. of necessary dress on an Actually I am come up.

7.5.94

Lord Rosebery's letter changing the date of the Cabinet so as not to clash with our wedding. Signed by Lord Morley, Sir Henry Fowler, Mr. Asquith, Lord Spencer and Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman.

The Autobiography of Margot Asquith

CHAPTER I

The Jameson Raid—Mr. Cecil Rhodes

Soon after our marriage, in the early part of the year 1896, England was stirred to its foundations by the news of the Jameson Raid—an abortive expedition undertaken by a handful of British soldiers and civilians to frighten President Kruger in South Africa.

You cannot have a better example of the change that has taken place in the moral conscience of this country than by comparing the indignation of the public over the foolish Jameson Raid and the apathy they showed over the cruel and futile policy of reprisals in Ireland.

With the exception of a few people in Mayfair, everyone combined in 1896 to repudiate an enterprise which covered England with ridicule, and the friends of Mr. Rhodes and Mr. Chamberlain with confusion.

Lady Warwick*—or "Comrade Warwick" as I ought to call her since she joined the Labour Party—wrote the following letter to the Editor of the *Times*:

"Warwick Castle,
"*Jan.* 4, 1896.

"Sir,

"It passes belief that to-day the English Press is so far forgetful of its bright traditions as to discuss, in cold blood, the prospective shooting or hanging

* The Countess of Warwick.

of Englishmen by the Boers. To what is it owing that this nomadic tribe is encamped in the Transvaal at all? It is owing to the determination of our nation that unspeakable indignities perpetrated on the negro race and its traffic in African slaves should no longer be permitted within a colony under the English flag. Are the unrequited wrongs of Kaffirs and Hottentots, are all the outrages which resulted in the 'bag and baggage' removal of the Transvaal Boers to be at this date supplemented by the judicial murder of Dr. Jameson?

"Sir, would any Englishman worthy of the name and the nation have failed to act exactly as Dr. Jameson and his gallant companions have done? He is appealed to by the leading residents of Johannesburg to come to the assistance of their women and children at a moment when a revolution is seen to be inevitable. On his way to succour his countrywomen with a force of mounted police, and after having disclaimed every intention of hostility to the Boers, he is apparently attacked by their armed forces. Further than this we as yet know nothing.

"But, whatever may have been his fate, there is not an Englishwoman of us all whose heart does not go out in gratitude and sympathy to these brave men. They did their duty, and if they have gone to their death, even in a fair fight, so much the worse for the Boers. But if they have been taken prisoners, to be afterwards done to death in cold blood, then there is no longer room in South Africa for a 'Republic' administered by their murderers. Neither German nor French jealousy can weigh in the balance at such a moment.

"'Freebooters' and 'Pirates'! Are English gentlemen—personally known to many of us—are such as these 'land pirates' and 'thieves' because

when implored by a majority of the respectable residents of an important town they attempt to police that town at a moment of extreme urgency?

"Are we, in short, so stranded in the shallows of diplomacy and of German intrigues that it is a crime for our kinsfolk to succour their kinsfolk in a mining camp in South Africa? Had Dr. Jameson, on the contrary, turned a deaf ear to the appeal of these of our race, and had an outbreak of race-hatred placed our kinsfolk in the Transvaal at the mercy of that community, so vividly depicted by the late Lord Randolph Churchill, then, indeed, Dr. Jameson had rightly incurred the reprobation of the German Emperor.

"Happily—and this is the one bright light in all this black business—there is a large-minded Englishman in South Africa upon whose resolute personality our hearts and hopes rely.

"I remain, Sir,
"Yours faithfully,

"FRANCES EVELYN WARWICK."

On January 11th (1896), the *Times* published a poem called "Jameson's Ride," from a famous contributor to the *Daily Telegraph*, the then Poet Laureate (one of the late Lord Salisbury's rather cynical appointments).

I will quote a few of the verses:

Swinford Old Manor,
Jan. 9th, 1896.

"Wrong! Is it wrong? Well, maybe:
But I'm going, boys, all the same.
Do they think me a Burgher's baby,
To be scared by a scolding name?
They may argue and prate, and order;
Go, tell them to save their breath:
Then, over the Transvaal border,
And gallop for life or death!

"There are girls in the gold-reef city,
There are mothers and children, too!
And they cry, 'Hurry up! for pity!'
So what can a brave man do?
If even we win, they'll blame us;
If we fail, they will howl and hiss.
But there's many a man lives famous
For daring a wrong like this!

"So we forded and galloped forward,
As hard as our beasts could pelt,
First eastward, then trending northward,
Right over the rolling veldt;
Till we came on the Burghers lying
In a hollow with hills behind,
And their bullets came hissing, flying,
Like hail on an Arctic wind!

"I suppose we were wrong, were madmen:
Still I think at the Judgment Day,
When God sifts the good from the bad men,
There'll be something more to say.
We were wrong, but we aren't half sorry,
And, as one of the baffled band,
I would rather have had that foray
Than the crushings of all the Rand."

ALFRED AUSTIN.

A few days after this my husband and I were dining with Lord and Lady Reay. I was introduced to the great South African millionaire, Robinson, of Robinson's Gold Mines, who had taken Dudley House for the London season. He was tall and deaf, and, as he offered me his arm to take me in to dinner, he paused on the stair, looked at me and said in a voice of thunder:

"What is your name?"

To which I replied almost as loud: "Asquith!"

Still standing in the middle of the staircase and blocking the way to the dining-room, he said:

"Any relation to the famous Asquith?"

At which I shouted: "Wife!"

He appeared so surprised that I wondered what he

thought Henry's wife ought to have looked like. After a short pause during which he seemed puzzled, he conducted me in to dinner and placed me opposite Sir Donald Wallace, who was then foreign editor of the *Times*.

I opened the conversation with my millionaire by asking him to tell me about South Africa, hoping to hear both the details and his opinions of the Jameson Raid. He asked me if I had ever been out there, to which I replied "No."

MR. ROBINSON: "Are you rich?" to which I answered no, but that my father was.

MR. ROBINSON: "Who is your Arthur?"

I explained that I had not said "Arthur" but father.

MR. ROBINSON: "Oh, well, I'll tell you how I made my money, if you'll tell me afterwards how he made his."

I gave myself up for lost, but soon became absorbed in his story.

He told me that he had started life in a humble way by keeping a little shop. One day a man came to him, with whom he had a slight acquaintance, and said that he was in great difficulties, adding that, if he could be helped with the loan of fifty pounds, his life would be saved: he promised that he would pay everything back, and Mr. Robinson lent him the money.

Time passed, but he heard nothing of his debtor. Two years later he received a letter from him, saying that he had been away trekking out of all reach of posts, which accounted for his silence. There was a map attached to the letter, giving a detailed description of a field on a farm which he said would some day be of enormous value: he had prospected it and found gold there. He enclosed his debt; and Robinson started off up country the same day.

The Boer farmer, who owned the field, received him with suspicion. They walked over the estate, and, when they came to the part indicated on the map, Robinson said that it looked an arid kind of place, but that he would

like to buy it, as he did not suppose it would be dear, and he wanted to start farming in a mild fashion.

To his surprise the Boer opened his mouth rather wide, asking him £500,* to which Robinson demurred But the farmer was obdurate, so he gave way and bought the field. When the business was over, they returned to lunch in the bosom of the Boer family, a neighbour or two having strayed in to see the foreigner. At the conclusion of the meal, the host, gazing steadily at Mr. Robinson, lifted his glass, and said he proposed to drink his health in honour of the day's sale, and with a rapid wink at his son he gulped down the country claret.

Mr. Robinson ended the story by telling me that after this he was pursued by all the women and children of the place, offering him dolls, beads and every kind of cheap ornament, as they looked upon him as a zany capable of buying anything.

This was the beginning of the great Robinson Mine.

When he had finished I turned to my other neighbour, feeling that I had perhaps neglected him, and found him in the throes of an argument about the Jameson Raid; he said that Jameson was a hero in spite of his failure, and that he himself was an Imperialist and thought it was high time we fought the Boers. He added in the vernacular of the day that it was only the damned Radicals who criticised Jameson, and they were well-known to love every country but their own. After a little talk I found the young Imperialist's conversation not so new to me as Mr. Robinson's, and, fearing lest he should discover I was a "damned Radical," I turned round and asked Mr. Robinson why the girls in the gold-reefed city had sent the famous telegram.

"How can you be so green?" he answered: "that telegram came from London!"

On hearing this, Sir Donald Wallace leant across the table and said that he was the only person in the world

* I am not quite sure if this was the exact sum.

who was in a position to contradict this, as the telegram had passed through his hands before being published in the *Times*. Not hearing what he said, Mr. Robinson interrupted by giving me a poke with his elbow.

"What is he talking about?" said he. "Does he say I'm a liar?" To which I answered firmly:

"Yes, Mr. Robinson."

I have often wondered and doubt if we shall ever know what the true history of that telegram was; for, though Sir Donald Wallace was a man of the highest honour, he might have been taken in. Mr. Robinson told me nothing further about Dr. Jameson, and we all got up from the table.

In connection with South Africa and Sir Starr Jameson, Lord Kitchener, on his return from the Boer War, came to see me before he went to India. In the course of our talk he told me that the two best people he had ever met in his life were Dr. Jameson and Lady Waterford,* and added that his experience of the so-called Loyalists in South Africa had not been a happy one, they were people of no sort of judgment, far too fond of money, he had never known them right on any question of politics—and ended by saying:

"Doctor Jim was the only one of the lot who could have made a fortune, but never owned a shilling! he was a really fine fellow."

Lord Kitchener was right. Sir Starr Jameson was an uncommon person and had great beauty and simplicity of nature; I heard an equally high testimony paid to him many years later by General Botha.

My husband and I met the Doctor first—a week or ten days before his trial and sentence—at Georgiana Lady Dudley's house: and the night before he went to prison he dined with us alone in Cavendish Square.

Dr. Jim had personal magnetism, and could do what he liked with my sex. He was one of those men who, if

* The sister of the present Duke of Beaufort.

he had been a quack, could have made a vast fortune, either as a doctor, a thought-reader, a faith-healer or a medium; but he was without quackery of any kind. I never thought him a fine judge of people, but here I may be wrong. If his brains had been as good as his nature, he would have had a commanding position in any country The reason that convinced me that they were not was when he told us of the great scheme that had failed: which was to kidnap President Kruger and carry him off in person. This somewhat jejune intention was happily frustrated. The Doctor was tried for "fitting out a warlike expedition against a friendly State in breach of the Foreign Enlistment Act" before Lord Chief Justice Russell, and on the 20th of July, 1896, he was condemned.

In connection with this trial my husband had a bet with a famous Irish Member of Parliament. This is what he wrote:

"House of Commons.

"Bet lost to Mr. Asquith ref. the trial of Dr. Jameson.

"Bet being a sixpenny stamp to a twopence-halfpenny one that the prisoners would be convicted.

"The penalty of the wager enclosed.

"Michael Davitt."

The responsibility for the Raid could not, however, be confined to Dr. Jameson. Both Mr. Cecil Rhodes' and Mr. Joseph Chamberlain's reputations were involved, and everyone was stirred.

Admirers of Mr. Rhodes went about saying that, if his name was struck off the list of Privy Councillors, they would show Joe up; and admirers of Mr. Chamberlain were going to show someone else up; and a Government Committee was appointed to show everyone up. The secret history of this affair may or may never be written:

but it would be of interest to learn how much those in authority knew of the intentions at the time of the South African Raiders.

I remember opening the front door of 20 Cavendish Square to Mr. Chamberlain one morning about that time, and showing him into my husband's library. At the end of a long visit I went into the room and said :

" What did Joe want, Henry ? " To which he answered :

" He asked me if I would serve on the Committee of Inquiry into the responsibility of the Jameson Raid—they call it ' the Rhodes Commission '—and I refused."

I asked him why he had refused, to which he answered :

" Do you take me for a fool ? "

I never spoke to Mr. Cecil Rhodes in my life, but I met him once at a party in Downing Street, when Mr. Balfour was leader of the House of Commons.

It was early in 1899 when South Africa was in a state of suppressed turmoil. Sir Alfred Milner*—the then Lord High Commissioner—was writing letters from Cape Town, warning us of the exact situation, but the Government turned a deaf ear to all his warnings.

Mr. Balfour had been told that if you listen to the man on the spot you cannot go wrong, and that Cecil Rhodes—the great hero of South Africa—was the proper person to consult about the Boer problems over which Milner and so many of us were exercised.

Mr. Rhodes had a name that was famous all the world over. Men and women trembled before him. A phrase much in vogue at the time—" Think Imperially "—was attributed to him ; also the poignant epigram, quoted by the more enlightened Tariff Reformers, that it was not the Article but the Art that ought to be encouraged in British trade. It is perhaps hardly fair to credit him with both these sayings, but it is certain that his lightest word carried weight. Lord Fisher, writing to me from the

* Viscount Milner.

Admiralty, quoted a talk he had had with Cecil Rhodes which impressed him deeply ; his letter ended with :

> " Rhodes is a wonderful fellow ! I will finish this long letter by quoting a clever thing he said to me to-day :
>
> " ' I have found one thing, and that is, if you have an idea and it is a good idea, if you will only stick to it, you will come out all right.'
>
> " Your affectionate
>
> " FISHER."

On arriving at Mr. Balfour's party in Downing Street, where I was to meet Mr. Rhodes, I took my host aside and asked him if " the man on the spot "—generally a favourite with the stupid—had given him his views on South Africa, to which he replied :

" Yes : he doesn't think there is the slightest chance of war ; he says, not only that the Boers *won't* fight, but that they *can't.*"

" Thinking Imperially " had made us confident that, after an experience of twenty years, Rhodes must know his South Africa, and we all took comfort together.

I looked round me at No. 10 but saw no one I wanted to talk to, so I penetrated into the next room. There, for the first time, I saw Burne-Jones' *Legend of the Briar Rose* hanging on the high panels put up by Disraeli in the Downing Street dining-room ; but more striking than this was the circle of fashionable ladies crouching at Cecil Rhodes' feet. He sat like a great bronze gong among them : and I had not the spirit to disturb their worship.

CHAPTER II

My Last Riding Adventure

Before recounting the domestic and political part of my new life, I will relate my last adventure in the sporting world.

When it was suggested by my doctor that I had better start hunting again to see if this would cure my sleeplessness, I began looking about for horses ; I had letters from most of the great dealers assuring me of their services, and among them one from a man who lived near Swindon.

He was an Irishman, and his letter describing his hunters was so graphic and alluring that I made up my mind I would pay him a visit.

On a bright day in June, I travelled down in my riding habit from London to Swindon ; I was met at the station by the dealer in a buggy. He was a little man of mild eye, cooing voice and full-blooded brogue.

We opened conversation at once on the subject of the hunters which he was going to show me.

" Firefly," he said, " is the one for you, a little short in the rib but a foine shoulther, and great stroide ; I took him with the Duke's hounds over some rails in the corner, and not warn followed ! " (he pronounced " one " as if it rhymed with " tarn "). " There's a bit of a grey mare you shall see in the ring—she goes rather sharp at her fences, but . . ."

Interrupting him here, I said, snappishly :

" I loathe a rusher ! "

THE DEALER (with emphasis) : " That she is *not* ! but she has *courage*—and if you give her the office she would jump into a conservatory—that is what you'll be wanting for the Leicestershire bottoms ; there'll be no gates there ? "

" You're wrong," I replied, " it's the best gated county in the world."

THE DEALER : " And is that so ? But it only takes one fall to kill you down there—and here no one is the worse for a roll or two."

" That is true," I said, " but tell me what else have you got for me to try ? In your letter you recommend Dandelion."

THE DEALER : " Sure and I did ! " (with a melting eye and arch expression). " He's a beautiful horse ! something to conjure with !—thoroughbred—all but in the book—full of proide and vanity ! He is difficult to ride in the small enclosures ; it's the Shire he is wanting. If he puts you down I'll give him to you. I thought of entering him for the Grand National, but Lord Lonsdale said to me racing will be the ruin of him."

While this conversation was going on we were tearing at a great pace down the road in the buggy. He pulled up suddenly before a bright red house set in laurels, and surrounded by sheds and stables. I saw, through the trees behind, a large paddock with a tan ring and fancy fences all round it.

THE DEALER (throwing the reins to an ostler and taking his watch out of his pocket) : " Five miles in 15 minutes and only gave £10 for you ! "

" Liar ! " I said to myself, collecting my things.

We went into the loose boxes and looked at the hunters while bustling stablemen stripped one animal after the other in monotonous succession.

Although I have done a good deal of " going round

stables" I have never succeeded in finding anything to say on these occasions, so I begged him to get his man to ride whatever was ready for me as soon as possible.

THE DEALER: "It's yourself shall choose; now which shall it be?" Remembering his letter I said:

"What about Dandelion?"

THE DEALER: "Oh! you shall ride him yourself with me later on down the road."

"Down the road!" I said with some indignation. "You mean over the fences?"

THE DEALER: "Not just at first; you must feel him under you. Jim, bring the grey mare to the paddock, and we'll walk on."

We walked down to the gate and into the field followed by the grey mare.

I could see Jim was a fine rider; long stirrups, a loose easy seat and brimless hat. The grey, so far from being a "little mare," struck me as big, angular and gawky. The moment her large feet hit the ring she shot off! Jim handled her well, but as she approached the first fence, which was small and scrubby, she rushed at it like a bull at a flag, took off from her stomach, and, hardly rising at all, landed twenty feet the other side. The hedge closed up behind her, and one might have supposed she had never touched a twig. In Leicestershire I knew the fence would have either been taken up by the roots, or I would have been taken home on a hurdle. It was the same every time she jumped. Had it not been for Jim, who, with gigantic strength and nerves of iron, forced her to rise from her quarters at the only obstacle of any importance, he and the mare must have parted company.

"Good Heavens!" said I, "if she's not a rusher, I've never seen one! I only hope you give Jim high wages!"

"Bless your soul," was his instantaneous reply, "I

wouldn't give a curse for a horse who, with the one fence leapt, hadn't the next one challenged ! "

Although amused, I was by no means mollified by this. I felt it had been an unlucky show, and the dealer, quickly perceiving what was in my mind, said in tender, almost caressing tones :

" It's summer, and the divils don't get half enough exercise. I sell them all off too quick ! It's meself that should look after them."

" Really ! " said I, " it's useless to show me this kind of animal ! Let us see the Gordon horse, or Dandelion ; what about the great Dandelion ? "

He did not respond, but went on wondering how he could remove the evil impression that the grey mare had made upon me. With a reflective air, and tapping his boot, he said, half to himself :

" Ah ! if that mare had only been fit, you'd have had a foine ride this morning ! "

To which I replied :

" Not I ! My only chance would be if she were tired, and then she'd lay me out for dead."

THE DEALER : " Is it the grey mare you mean ? *She would not !* I'd gladly be in prison for the stealing of her ! Jim's not a rider like yourself. I wouldn't take two hundred guineas for her ! Now, I'll tell you what I'll do ! I'll get her fit and give you a mount with the Duke, and you can break her neck and not a word will I say ! "

" She'll break mine " said I, " and then neither of us will be in a position to argue ! Come on, let us see Dandelion."

He bustled off and I stood silently on the stone block. After waiting some time I observed two men bringing out Dandelion—one leading him and the other walking by his side with a towel over his arm. The favourite was, I must say, a most fascinating horse to look at ; 15.3, dark chestnut, his coat shining like the back of a violin ; a

short back, loose elbows and not a blemish anywhere. Something in his appearance reminded me of a Disraeli novel—the quivering nostril of his little nose, and the vindictive roving eye. He looked like a brilliant adventurer. I said to myself: "If this horse is all they say, both my fortune and the dealer's are made."

I watched him coming towards me with a resolute and elastic step. Something moved in the laurels—he pricked his ears and stopped at once. I could see he was both irritable and observant. The second ostler instantly clutched the other rein close to the bit, and Dandelion, pointing his toes, danced up to the block at an impossible angle for me to mount from.

THE DEALER: "Begorra! Bad luck to it! he is fresh too. Now—boys—steady! steady with the cloth!"

This mysterious, almost clerical expression mystified me for a moment. A third stable-boy came out, and winking rapidly at his companions assisted with great energy in holding the towel round Dandelion's restless head, and covering his eyes, and the horse quivering all over was gently pushed to the block. My heart sank. Why did the ostler wink? Why had I come at all? This would never do; it was high time to show spirit: pointing to the towel, I said with all the courage that I could muster:

"What is all this paraphernalia about, pray?"

THE DEALER (persuasively, and avoiding the point): "You never liked a quiet one, now did you? Dandelion is highly strung—he is over-bred, and cannot endure the block."

"But," said I, "you told me I was to mount off the block; very well, I don't mind! Take the towel off his eyes and put me up from the ground."

THE DEALER (pleadingly): "Bless your soul! you're on him but for the putting out of your foot."

I stood perfectly still and the ostler said soothingly:

"It's all right, lady! You needn't be frightened."

"I am not frightened—but Dandelion appears to be!" said I with indignation.

THE DEALER (with forced animation): "Bless your soul! Is it Dandelion that would be afraid! It would take a new heaven and a new hell to scare *him*," and with great boldness he stroked the only part of the horse's neck which was uncovered, saying in a coozling voice:

"There, *there*! COME! COME!! You're a G-r-e-a-t horse, aren't you?"

Trying to conceal my anxiety, I put my foot into the stirrup and hastily grabbed the reins.

THE DEALER (changing suddenly from coozle to caution, shouted): "Steady! . . . Steady! . . . Let go, boys!" and the three men burst away like squibs. Dandelion flung the towel to the earth with an ugly upward jerk of the head, and sprang like a cat into the air in a spiral twist—a movement with which I was not familiar. After this antic I felt a mixture of irascibility and apprehension creeping into my blood, and the dealer and I rode in silence down the road.

Dandelion was like a spring-bed under me. With the courage of a hard funker, I said:

"No one can try a horse on the high road; let us gallop round the fences in the paddock."

The dealer rather cavilled at this.

"There is foine grass by the side of the road further up," he said, "so let us go steady and mind the grips; it is very hot!"

I kept my eye on him. He was watching Dandelion with a look of intense anxiety, but said nothing. His face was shining like the blest.

We moved on to the grass at the side of the road as it widened out in front of us.

Suddenly I felt my horse's quarters rise almost to my shoulders—the reins hung like onion-strings in my hands, and Dandelion's head rolled back on to my chest like a camel's. What a fool I was not to have observed he had

a swivel neck! This, then, was why the two stablemen held the reins so close to his bit.

"We are in for it!" said I to myself, and clenching my teeth I took my foot out of the stirrup.

For one moment he stood erect upon his hind legs, and then, striking the grass with violent forefeet, we shot off and I knew that nothing I, or anyone else, could do would stop us; I felt as if I was sitting on the edge of a precipice. What had become of the horse's shoulders? They were not in front of me at all, but under my skirt like a cliff. In spite of Dandelion gazing at the skies we steered a straight course for about a thousand yards till the road gave a sudden turn. Instead of turning with it, we headed for a gate into a field on the opposite side. With the instinct of self-preservation he dropped his head and seemed to steady himself for the jump, but we were too near.

After hearing a great cry as of one in pain a long way off, followed by the roar of a donkey-engine in my brain, I knew no more. . . .

When I came to, figures and furniture were nodding at me: a thunderstorm was going on with the windows shut. Perpetual wailing of:

"Holy Virgin, Mother of God, say you're not dead!" was mixed up with a good deal of blurr and bustle.

I opened my eyes: I was lying on a hurdle on the parlour floor, with hot-water bottles all over me; the dealer, the doctor, and the district nurse kneeling on the ground, and the stable-boys peeping in at the windows.

THE DOCTOR (severely to the dealer): "But how did all this come about, may I ask?"

"This is just the question I am putting to myself, Sorr," he replied.

THE DOCTOR: "But I presume you are the only man that can answer it; didn't you find out before about the horse? Was he not known?

THE DEALER: "Sure and he was known! He has gone across country in every field in England, and from what I am told he is going hard now! It's the megrims he has got, Sorr; will your honour tell me what the lady has?"

CHAPTER III

My Theories upon Children and My Baby

In marrying a man whose time was divided between the Law Courts and the House of Commons, with a permanent home in London, and having to look after a family of five children, I was aware that I had undertaken serious responsibilities; and those who mistook vitality for frivolity kept a sharp eye upon me to see what I was going to make of them.

My duties were no longer voluntary and intermittent achievements but regular performances, and the life I was facing, though composed of many of the same people, was strangely different from that of my girlhood.

With the exception of a dangerous dysentery contracted in youth, I had known no illness; and neither my work among the poor, nor play among the rich, nor travels abroad had affected my general health; but for many years after my first confinement I was a delicate woman.

I wrote in my diary:

From my Diary

"I am not old enough to acquiesce in loss of health, and feel as if I were too young to die. I have always realized the shortness of life; and have watched with amazement in past years the millionaires screwing over their money, the silly fussing over their dignity, and the rotten wasting their substance; but, though I am not afraid of death and know that the old have to die, I thought that I and my contemporaries would go on living side by side for ever, and it never entered my head

From my Diary

that I might become an invalid. I do not know at all what is required of me, and whether I am going to linger on weak and wretched, or die under an operation ; but I would prefer the doctors to open me up and find out what is wrong—I will make my will and leave good-bye letters for Henry and the children to read when I am dead."

End of Diary quotation

Not the least sorrowful part of having neurasthenia is that your will-power, your character and your body are almost equally affected by it. Time, oxygen and diet, added to regularity of hours and an untainted atmosphere, are essential for complete recovery ; and, what is even more vital, a patient and perfect understanding in your daily surroundings. I was delicate for so long that in the year 1908, when my husband became Prime Minister, I went to St. Paul's Cathedral and prayed that I might die rather than hamper his life as an invalid.

I had bouts of health golfing in Scotland and hunting in Leicestershire—an occupation I had given up, but which I resumed on the advice of my doctor, Sir John Williams, and through the kindness of my friend, Sir Ernest Cassel, who mounted me—but sleep had lifted itself like a veil from my eyes. No one who has not experienced over any length of time real sleeplessness can imagine what this means ; and when I hear men and women describing at length the wretched nights they have had, and look at their comfortable figures and complacent countenances, I confess my attention wanders. Being of sound mind myself I can only say that insomnia is akin to insanity.

The station-master at Waverley, in Edinburgh, was the first person* who gave me any real hope. Mr. Paton had known and cared for me and my family for many years and was distressed at seeing me look so ill.

* The next step towards my recovery was due to the wisdom of my present doctor, Sir Thomas Parkinson.

"You seem very poorly, what's wrong wi'ye?" he asked one day; and, when I told him that I was almost afraid to go to bed for fear of wakefulness, he said in his pretty Scotch accent and putting his hand upon my shoulder:

"You ought to be very glad; people sleep far too much in their lives—I never allowed myself more than five hours; you can always doze now and again, and get a wee bit rest in the off times."

This was a great saying, and when I went to bed that night I determined that if I should live I would set myself to feel gratitude instead of fear in the future. I did not weigh seven stone, and, agreeing with *Lady Wenlock, that my skeleton was too instructive to be exposed to those who go out for amusement—I gave up balls and parties and threw myself into domestic life.

From my youth I had a passion for little children, and at the time I was expecting my second baby I was working out theories upon education which I had long held and deeply considered. Before relating of my experiences I will quote what I wrote upon my theories.

"There is no position, not even the President's in the United States, as unchallengable as a mother's; she has a start over her children which winged feet cannot overtake. The comings in and goings out, the clothes, the food, the very hairs of their heads are known to her; she has a power like unto God's.

"The greatest of all love being that of the mother it is also the rarest. Maternal instinct is Nature and needs no witch to perceive; but the kind of Love I mean is Inspiration. To save them from suffering, women have killed themselves and their children. It was not good manners that prompted men on sinking ships to make way for women and children; but the recognition of this great Love.

* Lady Wenlock of Escrick, Yorkshire.

"There are women who specialize in motherhood; they collect, catalogue and kodak themselves with their children; these are the mothers *who dedicate their family to themselves*, subconsciously setting up a personal worship; but neglect is less suffocating than advertisement, and, though it is harsh reflection, a child left to the dull arrogance of an aunt has a better chance of finding itself than if it is brought up by the self-enfolded mother.

"It is a matter of unconcern to this kind of woman, if the child pleases her, that it does not please other people, and I notice that she cannot bear a breath of criticism. Mothers who dedicate themselves to their children do not suffer from this blindness of heart. They are unnerved by screams, maddened by pertness and wounded by disobedience.

"Some people say, 'We can't alter anyone in life; people remain what they are born, and you only learn by experience,' but I should not care to live if I thought we had been given incommunicable lives.

"Can it be true that all the love, all the prayers, all the money and the counsel we give one another, is useless? Are children to be left to the guidance of a governess, Eton, or some squalid personal experience to arrive at the Heights? I could not bear to believe this, and said to myself a perfect mother should start a school, or found an Order.

"There are Orders that go in for nursing, praying, starving, or contemplation; and others for promoting wild-birds or uplifting bad girls; but they seldom meet Life.

"You may live on haddocks' heads and think you flatter Christ; or call yourself or your Order a Free Mason, a Free Forester, a Free Thinker, or by any other name: you may wear the Green or the Primrose, and dress your baby in blue and vow her to the Virgin, but a true mother must arm herself first and then her child, if she wishes to challenge the world.

" There are parents who believe in bringing up their children without education or religion. Some say :

" ' Don't speak to me of your schools where they take scholarships, no child of mine shall be pushed—give me old Eton where they will make a gentleman of him ' ; and others, who are either angry with God or superior to Him :

" ' I don't like goody-goody men ! Heaven forbid that my son should be a milksop.'

" I have known the offspring of both these parents and can only say that nothing children can be given later in life can compensate for the disadvantages of such a beginning.

" A child is unlucky if it is not taught early by its mother or nurse that the object of life is to go to Heaven, and that, if we are good, when we die we go there. Going to Heaven is departing from Self which is not only the teaching of Christ but the foundation of all Education : so much did our Lord believe in Self-departure that He startled the world by the greatest of all sayings : ' Love thine enemy.'

" You may or may not believe in Christ, but He never said a negligible word.

" The road to the Cross is softened for Roman Catholics; they rest on their way to worship the Virgin and Child : but for us there can be no rest, and only one way.

" It therefore comes to this : the gift that is sent to lighten our darkness is the Child, and I made up my mind as I watched for that light that I would dedicate myself to my children."

This is the end of the paper I wrote upon my theories.

One day, shortly before the birth of my baby, I was discussing these matters with my husband, and he read me the following extract :

FROM THE ENGLISH WORK OF ROGER ASCHAM, PRECENTOR TO QUEEN ELIZABETH BORN 1515. DIED AT THE AGE OF 53.

" Before I went to Germanie, I came to Brodegate in Leicestershire, to take leave of that noble Lady Jane Grey,* to whom I was exceeding much beholdinge. Her parentes, the Duke and Duches, with all the household, gentlemen and gentlewomen, were hunting in the parke. I found her in her chamber, readinge Phaedon Platonis in Greeke, and that with as much delite, as some jentlemen would read a merie tale in Bocase. After salutation and dewtie done, with some other talke, I asked, why she would leefe such pastime in the parke? Smiling, she answered me :

" ' I wisse, all their sport in parke is but a shadoe to that pleasure that I find in Plato. Alas! good folke, they never felt what trewe pleasure ment.'

" ' And howe came you, Madame,' quoth I, ' to this deepe knowledge of pleasure? And what did chieflie allure you into it, seeinge not many women, but verie fewe men, have attained thereunto.'

" ' I will tell you,' quoth she, ' and tell you a truth, which perchance ye will marvell at. One of the greatest benefites that ever God gave me is, that he sent me so sharpe and severe parentes, and so jentle a schoolmaster. For when I am in presence eyther of father or mother ; whether I speake, kepe silence, sit, stand, or go, eate, drinke, be merie, or sad, be sowyng, playing, dauncing, or doing anie thing else, I must do it, as it were, in such

* This discourse with this excellent lady he thus expresses in a letter to his friend Sturmis :

" Hac superiore æstate, cum amicos meos in agro Eboracensi viserem, et inde literis Joanis Chechi in Aulam, ut huc proficiscerer, accitus sum, in via deflexi Leicestriam, ubi Jana Graja cum patre habitaret. Statim admissus sum in cubiculum : inveni nobilem puellam, Dii boni ! legentem Græce Phædonem Platonis ; quem sic intelligit, ut mihi ipsi summam admirationem injiceret. Sic loquitur, et scribit Græce, ut vera referenti vix fides adhiberi possit. Nacta præceptorem Joannem Elmarum. utriusque linguæ valde peritum ; propter humanitatem, prudentiam, usum, rectam religionem, et alia multa rectissimæ amicitiæ vincula, mihi conjunctissimum."

THE RIGHT HON. H. H. ASQUITH

WITH HIS DAUGHTER ELIZABETH, NOW PRINCESS BIBESCO

weight, measure, and number, even so perfitelie as God made the world, or else I am so sharplie taunted, so cruellie threatened, yea presentlie, sometimes, with pinches, nippes, and bobbes, and other waies, which I will not name for the honour I bear them, so without measure misordered; that I thincke myselfe in hell, till time come when I must go to Mr. Elmer ; who teacheth me so jentlie, so pleasantlie, with such faire allurements to learninge, that I thinke all the time nothing whiles I am with him. And when I am called from him, I fall weeping, because whatsoever I do else, but learninge, is full of grief, trouble, feare and whole misliking unto me And this my booke hath been so much pleasure and more, that, in respect of it, all other pleasures, in very deede, be but trifles and troubles to me.'

" I remember this taulk gladly, both because it is so worthir of memorie, and because also it was the last taulk that ever I had, and the last tyme that ever I saw that noble and worthir ladie."

. . . . . .

I will here quote from my diary:

From my Diary, February 26th, 1897

" My baby was born on the 26th of February, 1897, at 2 o'clock in the morning, in 20 Cavendish Square, and I christened her Elizabeth Charlotte Lucy. After reading a life of Goethe's mother I thought that if ever I had a girl I would call her Elizabeth.

" Had my choice been Mary-Jane, baby's name could not have been more condemned. Someone consoled me by saying that her initials spelt ' Ecla ' which might be prophetic. I could not have handicapped her from the start by calling her ' Margot,' and personally I love the name Elizabeth. In Hebrew it means ' God is my covenant ': Eli—God ; Shabeth—Covenant. It is reminiscent of old houses, finely mown lawns and valueless pictures, and has a kind of square grace which will work well in the future whether she is plain or pretty.

From my Diary, April 10th, 1897

"Her godfathers at her baptism on the 10th of April, 1897, were Godfrey Webb and brother Eddy; her godmothers, Charty, Lucy and Con Manners. As Eddy could not attend the christening, he wrote:

"'Elizabeth shall have all she wants in life and Glen shall be to her what it is to us. She will learn to love all that we have loved, and I will take her by the hand and talk to her. God bless you and her.'

"Lady Harcourt came to see my baby the day after she was born, and Lord Rosebery, Arthur Balfour, Milner, George Curzon and Randall Davidson came when I was allowed to lie upon the sofa.

"In April, 1898, Elizabeth walked towards me for the first time.

"In August of the same year, at St. Andrews, she burst into tears because I did not look up at the nursery window from the links. Her nannie wiped her eyes and said: 'There! there! your mumma's golf mad.'

"She ran up to me on my return saying: 'Guff mad! mumma, Guff mad!'

"She has a wonderful ear and by December could sing 28 songs with all their words in perfect tune. The ones I love best are, 'In Dublin's fair City'; 'I'm your little true Lover'; 'Someone stole my heart away 'liding (riding) on a load of hay'; and 'You stick to the boats, lad!'

"On the last day of the year while she was saying her prayers after finishing with 'God bless Margot,' as she always calls Violet, she ended, 'And Everybody Else Amen!!' clapping both her fat little hands. She is quite fearless and has a violent temper.

"On February the 26th she was two, and we were walking together in Cavendish Square; we passed an old fellow sitting half-asleep on the handle of his barrow, at which she stopped and in a lowered voice of much compassion, said:

'Oh! poor man! look, mother, at the poor old man!'

From my Diary, 1898

" I am more interested by this than anything that has happened, as showing heart at the age of two is rare.

" When asked her name she always answered, ' Baby Asquith in the Park ; Lizbebuth at home.'

" In spite of constant references to ' Gawd ' my baby is a wicked little creature of sudden temper and violent impulse which distresses me. I treat her tantrums as an illness, sponging her face with cold water, coozling her in my arms and singing while she batters me with her wool boots, calling me ' Uggerly ! nasty ! beasserly mother ! '

" She argues too much for a child of three and has all the Asquith love of controversy as well as their logic.

" ' Don't, darling ! ' I said one day to her, ' I'm too old to argue ' ; at which she said in a condescending voice :

" ' All right ! *All right ! You* is right and *I* are wrong.'

" On the 30th of July, 1900, while saying her prayers at Wanboro, she ended : ' Don't let the katten bite my hair and make mother truthful and obedienet. Amen.'

" She asked me one day, ' why God had taken her nannie's mother to the sky,' adding, ' hasn't He got a mother of His own ? ' I could see the Almighty seemed incomplete to her for many years after this. Jesus Christ coming down upon earth was another puzzle.

" ' I know He comes down sometimes of course, on His Christmas and all that, but why not oftener ? ' she asked.

" She continued for a long time to be argumentative, but happily for me the responsibility of the controversies was put upon her dolls. In December she told me her Christmas dollies :

" ' Contricted each other something drefful ! Betty says B does not spell for baby ; that B-A-B-Y is bun ! ! now there's no Y in bun as we all know, and so they go on, mother ! ' she added with a matronly smile."

End of Diary quotation

On the 22nd of January, 1901, we heard of Queen Victoria's death, and early in February I left Elizabeth to go to St. Moritz by the doctor's orders. Anxiety at parting from my baby did not improve my health, but I thought of the saying of St. Augustine's mother, " l'enfant de tant de prières ne peut ségarer," and leaving her in the charge of my stepdaughter—who was always a natural mother—somewhat reassured me. The remarkable letters I received from Violet when I was in Switzerland kept me in constant touch with my nursery, and Elizabeth wrote to me every week, ruling her own crooked lines and writing in huge letters on the envelope, " FOR MOTHER ASQUITH," enclosing :

" I love you.
Baby."

In a letter from Violet, dated February, 1901, she wrote :

> " Baby said to me to-day, ' I do hope if I have another baby it will have brown eyes ! I've had 9 children and they've all got blue eyes—not one of them takes after their mother, which seems a great pity ! ' "

Later in that year Violet developed a strange kind of paralysis which was a terrible grief to us all. One night her father went up to sit with her and found baby playing on the bed. She scowled at him and said : " There are some gentlemen which I wish had never been born."

On being asked who these could possibly be, she answered :

" Mr. Asquith," but, not liking the look of reproach upon Violet's face, she added airily :

" And Mr. Lilac and Mr. Laburnum ! "

One day in January, walking with her brothers, Arthur and Bertie, they told me she had said : " You

Mary Asquith
1922

young fellows and gentlemen don't know half the beautiful things we girls and young ladies know," and, when one of them asked her to give them an instance, she answered :

" You don't call each other nice names like we do— ' dearest darling ; friend of my heart ; saint of my soul ; loverly sweet.' "

After a disturbing day I walked on tiptoe into baby's bedroom and found her lying awake in the dark. As she had worn herself out that afternoon with her own temper I had hoped to find her asleep, but she said in a ringing voice from her cot :

" I knowed it was you ! I heard you come tasselling along ; not many love as we do, do they, mother ? "

She was devoted to her father and amused him by saying in an understanding manner after hearing his criticism of a new acquaintance :

" There are a lot of odds in the world, aren't there, father ? "

In talking over serious matters one evening she said to me :

" We don't know much about Gawd, do we, mother ? "

To which I reluctantly replied :

" No, darling, not very much, excepting that . . ." At this she interrupted me with vehemence :

" Oh ! don't let's talk about Him ! "

Death was a great puzzle to her, and one day at Cromer in 1901 she said with what she described as a " nice cheered-up little face " she would not mind dying a bit ; at this I answered evasively :

" No, darling ? "

" We shall all be together, you know. And there'll be flowers what won't die ? " she added consolingly. " Won't there, mother ? "

I answered : " Yes."

" What won't die ? " . . . she repeated thoughtfully, and after a pause added : " I s'pose we shan't see that apricot again what you and I ate together on the wall

at Wanborough. Do you know what I am always thinking about, mother ? "

I told her I could not guess ; she said :

" I want to die the same day as you ; I *must* die the same day as you ! The sad part is we shall never know."

With this she burst into tears.

On Sunday, the 9th of November, 1902, my son was born.

Before relating of Anthony I would like to finish with an experience I had of Elizabeth when she was three years old which rather upset my theories.

Things were going well for me in the household : the hours were regular, the servants contented, the step-family perfect and my nursery beautiful.

I had succeeded in making baby so devoted to me that, at the sight of a friend or a sister, she would fling herself upon the floor and swallow the mat.

When an elderly lady settled down to tea Elizabeth would say in a ringing voice :

" Hope you will go soon ! "

The friend may be deaf but you are not, and you are tempted to say :

" You had better go upstairs, darling, if you are so rude," but refrain, as you are not sure that your darling will obey, and I always questioned the morality of making a punishment of either my nannie or the nursery.

The same thing happened every day unless I took the precaution to say I was out.

One afternoon as I watched my baby in the boudoir brandishing a Chelsea cup—which I had left within her reach while adjusting my veil before going to a matinée—I felt the moment had come to put my theories into practice.

I knelt down and tenderly but firmly dislodged the cup from her hand. I felt a yearning towards her as I not only detested matinées but was giving up my afternoon with her. Placing the cup slyly behind my back

upon a chair, I lifted my veil and bent forward, leaning my face lovingly against hers : with unforeseen alacrity she seized my hat and threw it into the fire. Whether from a sense of sin or the shock of the flames I do not know, but she clung to me with both her arms and burst into tears.

My Paris hat was of fine straw trimmed with flamingo-coloured Prince of Wales' feathers and the last word in fashion. Touched by her sobs and in no way regretting the matinée, I lifted my baby into my arms and sitting upon the chair was prepared to show her with becoming gravity the enormity of her crime, but the passion of her remorse was steadily telling upon me, and I found my only desire was to comfort her : while disengaging myself from her embrace to fumble for my handkerchief, she perceived the Chelsea cup lying upon the chair behind me. Her sobs instantly ceased and with a cheerful " Tisty ! Tosty ! " she waved it round her head and dashed it to the ground.

Her tears, which I had taken for remorse, were baffled rage, which not even consigning my feathers to the flame had appeased, but the discovery of the forbidden cup was more than consolation, and she scrambled off my lap gazing with glee upon the broken bits of china.

I felt it was " up to me " as the Americans say to make her feel how much her wilfulness had hurt me, and, as she was nearly three years old and understood perfectly all that was said to her, I explained that she would have to have her tea without me that afternoon as I could no longer play with her ; that her nannie would be as shocked at her behaviour as I was ; and ended by saying no one would love a little girl who resembled her in any way whatever. She listened attentively but was unmoved. I took her hand and we walked silently out of the room. Before reaching the gate at the top of the nursery stairs, she began shouting :

" Sorry ! Sorry ! ! Sorry ! ! ! " which she repeated

in a vehement crescendo, hoping to enlist the approval of her nurse. Nannie, with that faint look of complacency which comes to nurses on seeing the failure of the mama, took Elizabeth from me, and after resisting kissing her I slowly closed the nursery door reflecting that my cup was broken, my hat burnt, my matinée missed, and that I had punished myself even more than my baby. Tears came into my eyes as I thought how easily I could have educated other people's children.

Finding myself without an engagement in the world I wandered into the Square hoping to meet Elizabeth ; but nurses like other people have their own shopping, and, what with the matinée and the rumpus, I had forgotten to find out the plans of my perambulator.

On my return, not having much appetite, I fingered the scones and wondered whether I wanted my baby to be miserable and unhungry without me, or eating a hearty meal upstairs. I walked stealthily to the nursery and listened at the open door. It takes a clever nurse to remove the chill that a mother's absence has caused without condoning the child, and I heard the table-talk resigning itself into technicalities.

" Munch slowly, now ! . . . What are those dandies doing, baby ? . . . Get on with your sponge-cake, darling," etc., etc. The nursery-maid, feeling that it would be out of place, refrained from showing the strangers in her tea-cup, and, except for the click of the crockery, there was not a sound to be heard.

After remaining alone in the passage with the rocking-horse I turned sadly away from my nursery, and reflected as I went downstairs that punishing my baby was a discipline I would practise with caution in the future.

The violence of her temper distressed me, and I wondered if she was not living too much with older people. I thought if I invited a few small children for her to play with it might make all the difference ! So in high spirits I went off to buy her first expensive party-frock.

MARGOT TENNANT

WITH HER NIECE BARBARA LISTER (WIFE OF SIR MATHEW WILSON)

Fine clothes are usually a help in these entertainments, but from what cause I have never discovered nannies are usually cross on party days, and by the time you have watched your child's face polished, the curls wrenched off its forehead and all the ribbons tied, the fine flower of the party has faded, and fatigue takes the place of gaiety in your heart.

I would have been better advised to have left my night-nursery while the process of dressing went on, as nannies brighten up when they become hostesses, and fussing about with hats and cloaks takes the edge off their tempers.

Although I had never enjoyed parties myself when I was young, I had always hoped that my babies might, and had spared no pains that day to make everything perfect. I left the nursery to enquire if the cakes I had chosen had arrived, and returned in time to see my daughter receiving the last of her guests with a look of strained suspicion. Toys were produced from cupboards and lent—but not for long. I observed my hospitable baby grabbing every bear and doll away from the guests with violence and even emotion. In vain I said :

" Oh ! darling, do let the dear little boy have it, he won't keep it ! Do let him have it just once to play with, he will give it back to you." Toy after toy was clasped to an agitated chest till I prayed for tea. Tea is the slowest of all meals to hurry, although everything is there except boiling water, of which there is presumably some always in the kitchen ; but, seeing that matters had come to a standstill as the hostess was unwilling to play herself or give up anything for the others to play with, I felt that the moment had come for direct action, and crossing the room I nerved myself to present a toy to each little visitor. Elizabeth stood ice-bound, gazing at me with her brown beautiful eyes. My heart ached, her heart ached ; she eyed her treasures held by the awe-struck guests and saw her kingdom slipping away from

her. With a gulp and a leap she butted a hot head against my breast and I was only too glad to sweep her off into the night-nursery.

After tea we played " musical chairs " and I saw with concern that every time the music stopped the strongest visitor lifted my baby into an already occupied chair. This monotonous courtesy wound up a sorry afternoon, and I felt sad to think that my first party had been such a failure.

When I had finished undoing the tapes of Elizabeth's cotton corsets at bath time I tried to explain to her what a pity it had all been ; but the departure of her guests had put her in intoxicated spirits, and gliding off my knee she began to jig about naked on the floor. I sat silently watching her, feeling unequal to clouding the end of an exhausting day. Over-excitement brought her finally into my arms, and, after listening to a yawning hymn, we scurried through the Lord's Prayer, and kissing her many times I left the room.

On my way to bed I went into the night-nursery and found my white cot in painful disarray ; nothing but the bars kept the blankets from the floor. A hot little creature with matted curls was lying completely naked on her back ; and murmuring in sobbing sleep :

" My mother did take away all my toys ! . . . All . . . *All* . . . ALL my toys ! ! "

Discouraged but persistent, at our next little gathering I guided Elizabeth into a corner at the end of the nursery and surrounding her with every toy she possessed I took the guests away by the hand, saying to them in a loud voice :

" Now, darlings, I will read you a lovely story and show you the pretty pictures."

In pretending to find my place in the book my eyes strayed furtively to the corner of the room. I observed most of the bears manœuvred into position and with a fine gesture my baby was pressing the head of her Highland

doll into a gallipot : bricks were piled up one upon the other when suddenly humming broke upon my ear. I started reading in a slow clear voice, but the humming got louder : fearing complete detachment, I read on with firmness and with fervour, but as the story developed so alas ! did the singing. The dolls begin to dance and the song becomes lyrical ; I dare not move and my heart fails, but not so " The Magic Fishbone "* ; there is a pause ; she looks up at me from her play, and oh ! joy ! my Elizabeth has had enough of herself and scurries across the room to join the party.

* A story by Dickens.

CHAPTER IV

Tariff Reform. Mr. Chamberlain. Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman.

In this final volume of my life I do not propose going into details of old political controversy, which are certain to be ably dealt with in the coming biographies of Sir William Harcourt and Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman; but as the events of 1905 and 1906 killed the Conservative party, and not only brought the Liberals into power with the largest majority ever seen, but led to my husband becoming Prime Minister, I shall quote passages from diaries in which I chronicled with great fidelity the happenings of every day.

From my Diary, November, 1904

"Survey of the year 1903, written in November, 1904."

"In May, 1903, the Unionist Government was in a good position. They had finished the Boer War and had won their Khaki Election, but the Commission set up following upon the war had disclosed serious blunders of organisation in many Departments. Mr. Brodrick's* new army scheme was a failure; the Budget was criticized, and the Education Bill was unpopular; the general expenses were enormous, and a universal feeling of lack of efficiency was abroad: the excuse given by the Government for this was that they had been too long in Office and were all completely exhausted. They talked fluently of being ready and willing to give up but nevertheless clung comfortably on.

* The Earl of Midleton.

From my Diary, November, 1904

"On the morning of the 16th of May, 1903, my husband came into my bedroom at 20 Cavendish Square with the *Times* in his hand.

"'Wonderful news to-day,' he said, 'and it is only a question of time when we shall sweep this country.'

"Sitting upon my bed he showed me the report of a speech made at Birmingham the night before by Mr. Chamberlain.*

"Joseph Chamberlain at that time stood in the eyes of his fellow-countrymen as the Business man; the great Imperialist and the Strong Fighter. The sort of praise one was always hearing of him was: 'No shilly-shallying about Joe! He hits straight from the shoulder! He'll give it 'em!! A pity there aren't a few more Joes!' etc.

"Political bruising, perfect speaking, artistic self-advertisement, audacity and courage combine to make Mr. Chamberlain to-day the most conspicuous politician since Gladstone.

"On the 15th of May, 1903, before the Whitsuntide recess he delivered a speech to his constituents at Birmingham which, as my husband said, had transformed the position of every political party. It advocated for the first time a policy of naked Protection, and woke up the barely controlled hopes of the whole Tory party. This caught on like wildfire with the semi-clever, moderately educated, the Imperialists, Dukes, Journalists, and Fighting Forces; incidentally bringing unity to the Liberals and chaos into the Government ranks.

"The Prime Minister† had one opportunity if he did not agree with his Colleagues, and we wondered if he would take it.

"On the adjournment of the House of Commons on the 28th of May, 1903, I went to the Speaker's Gallery full of excitement to hear the debate, and, meeting Mr.

* The Right Honourable Joseph Chamberlain, Colonial Secretary.
† The Right Hon. Arthur Balfour.

Survey of the year 1903 from my Diary, November, 1904

Balfour's secretary, Mr. Saunders, I seized him by the hand and said: 'Tell Arthur Balfour this is a *most* important occasion and do not let him think he can slip out of it.'

"'Don't be anxious, Mrs. Asquith, Joe is not going to speak to-day and all will be well,' he said, smiling sweetly at me, with the sympathy of one who thinks he scents an unconscious love affair

"Mr. Chamberlain, however, did speak; Arthur Balfour did not repudiate him, the fat was in the fire, and it has been bubbling and boiling over ever since; this fire cannot be put out, and at the present moment the Government majority has diminished by half.

"On September the 9th, 1903, Mr. Chamberlain resigned. He ended his letter to the Prime Minister by saying he thought he could promote the cause of Protection which he had at heart better if he were outside the Cabinet than in. His resignation was followed by several other members of the Cabinet, and when Arthur Balfour filled their places with avowed Protectionists people began to grope about for the Prime Minister's convictions.

"The methods by which Mr. Balfour contrived to rid himself both of the Free Traders and Mr. Chamberlain in his Government was a matter of speculation at the time, upon which I shall pronounce no judgment. He wound up a speech of importance at Sheffield on October the 1st by saying:

"'My request therefore to you to-night is that the people of this country should give to the Government, from whatever party that Government may be drawn, that freedom of negotiation of which we have been deprived, not by the force of circumstances, not by the action of over-mastering forces, not by the pressure of foreign Powers, but by something which I can only describe as our own pedantry and our own self-conceit.'

"Upon this speech the *Times* (October the 3rd, 1903) wrote: 'What is the net result of the proceedings at

Survey of the year 1903 from my Diary, November, 1904

Sheffield? It is that the Prime Minister has directly challenged and condemned a fiscal system which has held undisputed sway in this country for two generations, and in doing so has received the absolutely undivided support of the most authoritative gathering of Conservative representatives that it is possible to convene. People who think that nothing must be singularly ignorant of the political history of their country. We do not hesitate to tell them that it is a great deal more than they had any right to expect, and a striking testimony to the political sagacity and admirable leadership alike of Mr. Balfour and of Mr. Chamberlain. It is a perfectly astonishing thing that it seems to have been left only to the more clear-sighted opponents of these two men to perceive that they are playing the game with the perfect mutual understanding and the consummate skill of accomplished whist players.'

"Poor Arthur Balfour! In his anxiety to build a bridge upon which his colleagues can stand, he calls himself a Retaliator and says that he is *against Protection*. Free Traders are ousted from the Government and the Liberal Unionists have captured the Party Machine. In the by-elections the Tory candidate is blessed by both Balfour and Chamberlain, and though the Government profess absolute loyalty to the Prime Minister not a member of the front bench knows what to say or how to say it.

"What the Prime Minister enjoys doing with his subtle, detached and dissenting intellect, the rest of his followers perspire over in a labyrinth of confused platitudes and contradictory figures.

"I have come to the conclusion that the imagination that can work out and foresee the definite results of any policy proposed is rarer than the imagination that creates nymphs, moons, or passions.

"A group of young Tory dissentients led by Lord Hugh Cecil called themselves Free-Fooders. These young gentlemen were either going to break with the Unionist

From my Diary, November, 1904

Party and join us or compel the Prime Minister to break with Mr. Chamberlain; but I never much believed in them, and the result of it all is that they have broken with one another.

"A small party which included Sir Edgar Vincent,* Sir John Poynder,† Mr. Winston Churchill, and others, joined us.

ON HIS NERVES.

THE MAN AND HIS SHADOW.

Wherever Mr. Chamberlain goes he always finds the shadow of Mr. Asquith either before him or behind him. He is evidently, to judge from his speech at Preston, getting to feel haunted.

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"In June, 1903, Sir Michael Hicks Beach said to me: 'Of the two policies, Chamberlain's or Balfour's, I prefer the former; if retaliation were carried it would be infinitely more dangerous, but luckily it is impossible; it can never be a policy, rarely a remedy, and at best a bad expedient.'

* Lord D'Abernon. † Lord Islington.

"I saw little of Sir Michael this summer of 1904, but last year he was a frequent caller; he is handsome and agreeable, though a trifle uncertain. Henry, who likes him and thinks him an admirable speaker, said that people mistook for courage in him what was very often temper. From my Diary, November, 1904

"There will be a great redivision of parties in the future and we want new blood. Gladstone smashed us over Home Rule, and the Boer War divided us again, but now I believe the future is with us.

"The Chamberlain men get more annoyed with Arthur Balfour as his followers woo and draw him away from Protection, and the baffled and irritated Joeites hope against hope. The dividing line between the two is a tax upon food.

"Mr. Chamberlain is booked to address several meetings, and, the oftener he speaks, the better for us. Henry has followed him in all his fiscal orations.

"The flaws of the shallow Protectionist mind are just his subjects; a large grasp of accurate figures and the imaginative insight that is needed to expose the moral and commercial consequences of Protection show him at his best, and his arguments have neither been met nor answered. He has unswerving industry, a persistent and precise memory, and real judgment. The stand he has made against the fallacies and light reasoning of his opponents has been appreciated by both divisions in our Party—the C.B.ites and the Imperialists, and I doubt if he has ever stood higher than he does to-day."

. . . . . .

1905

"On the 2nd of January, 1905, the fall of Port Arthur brought the Russo-Japanese war to an end. It needed no witch to foretell the outcome of this conflict. From my Diary, 1905

"The internal condition of Russia had been horrifying thoughtful people for months past, nor can it be said that

From my Diary, 1905

Peace as understood by the present Russian Government* is much better, if you can apply such a word to the indifference and active hatred shown in that melancholy country to-day. Docile Russians are dying in thousands, not for making extravagant demands, but merely for asking for a little happiness, and the Czar, who was their Father and their God, counts for nothing.

"Any form of Government that continued for years against the will of the governed must degenerate into barbarity, as force has never been a remedy.†

"On the 22nd of January, 1905, a body of peaceful unarmed men went to the Palace with a deputation from the strikers to ask for decent treatment and a chance of life, but the Czar hid and would not see them, and the soldiers fired and killed the men, women and children.

"There will be no necessity for Anarchists now for the Czar has multiplied them; he will not be forgiven, and there are thousands of Russians to-day ready to kill and be killed for their country.

"Admiral Togo has annihilated the Fleet, which is a crushing blow, and there is only one disaster left for Russia to suffer now, which is a well-organized, complete, and bloody internal Revolution.

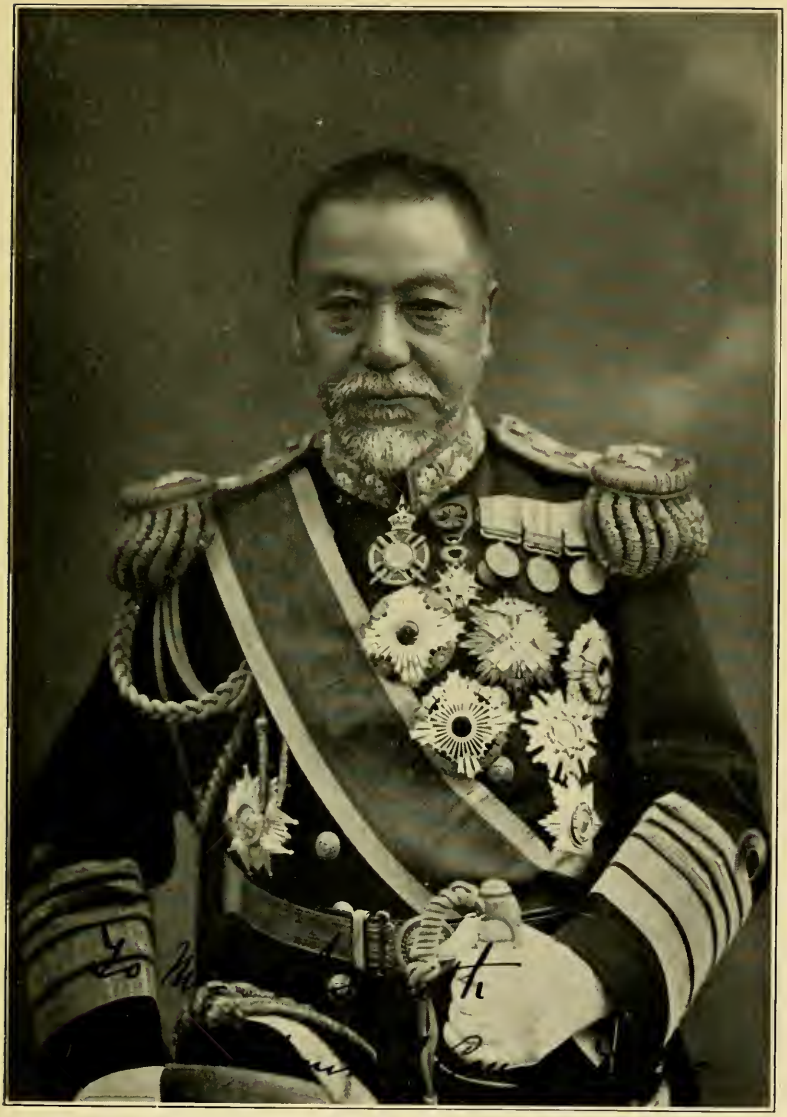
. . . . . .

From my Diary, 1905

"We were dining at Windsor Castle in November, 1905, two months before the General Election. After dinner Lord Farquhar, my husband, Mr. Chamberlain and General Oliphant went into the smoking-room, where they discussed the whole political situation. Henry told me about this talk; he said he had questioned the wisdom of the Government going for a General Election when everyone was saying the result would be defeat. At

* On the 28th of October, 1905, Arthur Balfour said to me at dinner at Whittinghame: "It is ridiculous and boring to draw parallels, but really the French Revolution was not much worse than what is going on in Russia to-day."

† I remember the same futile remark "Law and Order first" being made about Russia then as is made about Ireland to-day. Belief in Force is what will always differentiate the Unionist Party from ours.



ADMIRAL TOGO

THE COMMANDER OF THE JAPANESE FLEET IN THE RUSSO-JAPANESE WAR

this Chamberlain said that, although we were sure to win, we could not last as our majority would not be independent of the Irish and that then his policy would triumph throughout the country. From my Diary, 1905

" This appeared to Henry as it does to me an astonishing forecast. He was amazed and said :

" ' Well, my dear Chamberlain, I am not a betting man, but I am prepared to make you a small bet.'* At that moment Lord Farquhar rushed into the room and said :

" Come along quick ! The King ! ! ' General Oliphant uttered an irreverent epithet, and they joined us in the tapestry room, where we had been standing first upon one leg and then upon the other ever since dinner.

" On the 8th (March, 1905) Winston Churchill brought in a private members' motion that ' This House was against Protective taxes on food as not promoting the unity of the Empire.'

" The Whips were in a wild state of fear lest the Government should be turned out as their majority had dwindled to 70.

" We dined in the House that night with Mr. Ernest Beckett ;† our fellow-guests were Herbert Gladstone, John Morley, Harry Cust and Jack Poynder. Winston made an admirable, short and telling speech after dinner.

" Chamberlain's fire seems to have gone and his speech was dull. The House got impatient and shouted ' time ! time ! ' as they wanted to hear Lord Hugh Cecil, Henry, and Arthur Balfour. I should think this has never happened before to Mr. Chamberlain.

" I wrote to Winston Churchill congratulating him on his speech and saying I was surprised that 12 of the Free Fooders had had the courage to vote with us ; and this is his answer :

* This is the remark Mr. Chamberlain alludes to in his letter on page 79.

† The late Lord Grimthorpe.

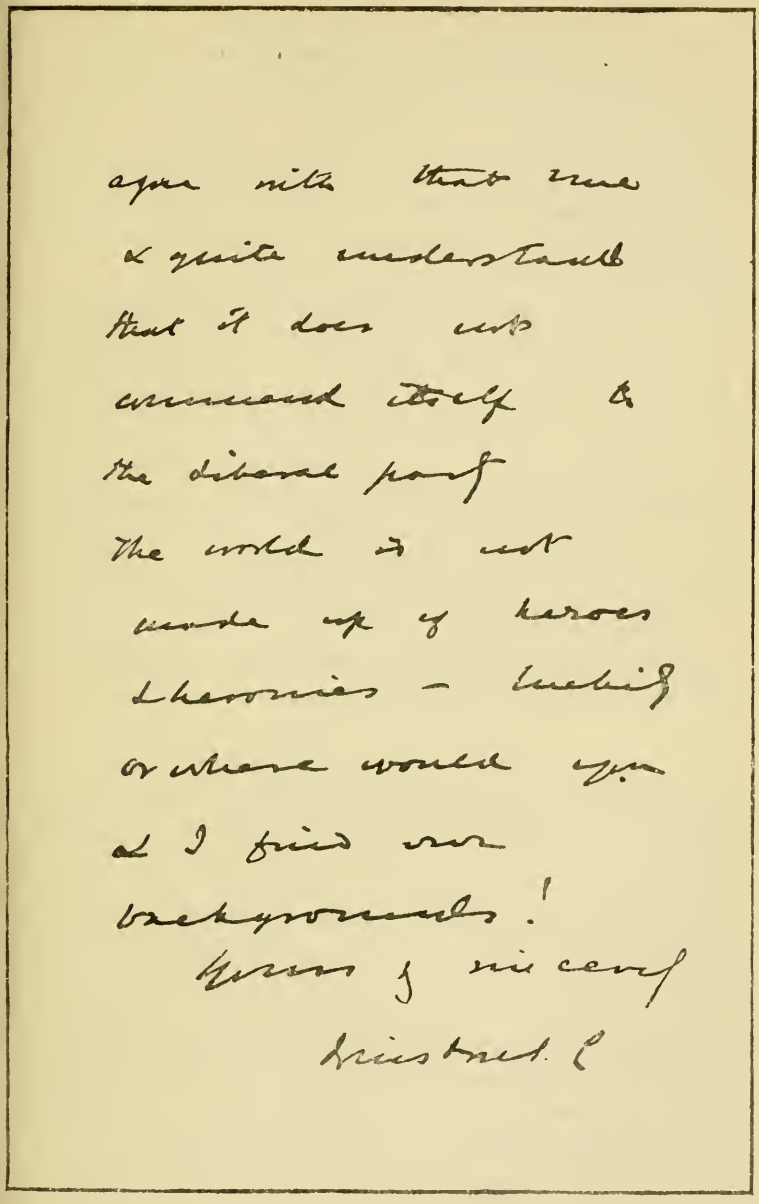
March 9th 1905

105 MOUNT STREET
W

Dear Mrs Asquith

Your letter is of kind & I am delighted to hear you were pleased

You are wrong about the free Fooders. No other similar body of men would have displayed such constancy amid such conflicting strains. I have always considered Edgar V quite consistent in his line – tho I do not



From my Diary, March, 1905

"On the 30th of March I lunched at 10 Downing Street; Evelyn Rayleigh, Arthur Balfour, Alfred Lyttelton and Gerald Balfour were there. They looked profoundly harassed, and I wished I had not accepted Evelyn's invitation. Not wanting to mention politics I talked of Chesterton's new book on Watts (the artist). Arthur Balfour asked me absently if I meant Dr. Watts the hymn writer or the steam man, adding: 'By the way, he is Watt, I think.'

"We then got on to biography; Arthur said that Mommsen, Stubbs and Creighton thought Macaulay the greatest historian that had ever lived; I said that perhaps he was, but that he was a noisy writer, to which Arthur answered:

'If great knowledge and accuracy welded into a picturesque whole is the function of History, Macaulay can well lay claim to being the greatest.' Alfred Lyttelton quoted John Morley's remark about brass instruments, but that 'he missed the mystery of the strings.'

"Walter Long, who had taken no part in the conversation, got up saying that he had to go to the House of Commons and the party scattered.

. . . . . .

"There has been a keen correspondence on the late Lord Salisbury's views upon Protection. On March the 30th Mr. Chamberlain wrote to the *Times*, Lord Hugh Cecil, Sir Michael Hicks Beach, Henry and others following him.

"I am a witness of Sir Michael Hicks Beach's account of his last talk to Lord Salisbury. He came to tea with me at 20 Cavendish Square, and said:

"'You will never guess where I have been all this afternoon.' As I was unable to guess, he told me he had been at Hatfield saying farewell to his chief. Not knowing that Lord Salisbury was fatally ill I expressed my distress and asked how he was, to which Sir Michael replied:

"'I never heard him talk better and nothing you can

say, Mrs. Asquith, against the Chamberlain policy or methods is as strong as what Lord Salisbury said to me this afternoon. He told me he had at one time been rather bitten with Protection, but that he had come out on the other side. I said to him : " My dear Chief, you need not tell me this ! " for I can assure you, Mrs. Asquith, that I had been very anxious at that time over Lord Salisbury's marked want of orthodoxy, and I told him so.' From my Diary, March, 1905

" In this conversation Beach went on to say that Retaliation was a more dangerous policy than Protection, but that as it was an impossibility he had ceased to consider it seriously.

" Remembering this talk vividly I thought Sir Michael's letter to the *Times* on the Salisbury controversy was too mild, and fearing that I had exaggerated what he had said to me in my diary I copied our conversation carefully out and enclosed it in a letter reminding him of his visit to me and asking him to tell me if I was right or wrong. He answered : From my Diary, 1905

" ' *April 7th,* 1905.

" ' DEAR MRS. ASQUITH,

" ' . . . You are quite right in your recollection of what I said to you in 1903.'

" Sir Michael Hicks Beach came to see me in 20 Cavendish Square on the 11th of April, 1905. He was in low spirits, and said he thought at the General Election his Party would have a great smash, but that they might remain in over that Session. Among other things he said of Lord Salisbury :

" ' My Chief had strong prejudices and strong convictions ; I have never found either in Arthur Balfour.'

" We met Lord James of Hereford at the Cosmo Bonsors', where we went on July 22nd for a Sunday. He was as keen as a kite about Protection. ' The curse of cheapness ' he said was a cry that filled him with amazement ; it showed a depth of folly which roused his

April 7/1905

Dear Mr. Asquith

I have hardly been here at all this week – or you should have had an earlier answer.

I am very sorry that I cannot call a Thursday afternoon but the Budget will then be going on, and of course I am rather specially interested in it. If there was a chance of your being in on either Tuesday or Wednesday at 5, I should be very happy to come.

You are quite right in your recollection of what I said to you in 1903

Winston S. Churchill

From my diary, 1908:

Although Winston is loveable and sincere there is not much judgment behind his genius. He is restless and of transitory convictions

whole nature, and he ended an excellent talk by saying to me : From my Diary, 1905

" ' When your new Government comes in, Asquith can have whatever he likes.' I remember Dizzy pointing to Randolph Churchill and saying : ' He can have anything he asks for, and will soon make them take anything he will give them.'

" On the 27th of July, 1905, the Duke of Devonshire moved a resolution against food taxes in the House of Lords and was followed in the debate by Lord Robertson, a law lord of great eloquence, who said in a fine speech that he remembered 20 years ago he had followed a leader in the House of Commons whose name was also Arthur, but the Arthur Balfour whom he had followed with an enthusiastic admiration, which even after that lapse of time he could never forget, was a leader whose ' Yea ' was ' Yea ' and whose ' Nay ' was ' Nay.'

" On the 31st of July, 1905, Milner came to see me. He stayed for two hours and we had a memorable talk. In spite of not being quite a man of the world, he has great distinction, and after a short conversation you long to talk more to him. He is not a diplomatist nor has he much ' flair ' about his fellow-men, but he has fascination of mind, and a character remarkable for its conscientiousness. He is both affectionate and truthful.

" He was in good spirits and pleased with Alfred Lyttelton's work in the Colonial Office on South Africa.

" He told me how strongly Mr. Chamberlain had opposed Chinese Labour, and that had it not been for Alfred's backing it could never have been carried.

" Whether from meeting men whose opinion he valued and who differed from him over Chinese Labour, or from what other reason I do not know, but he was not bitter, and was less disposed to think our Opposition a mere ' Party cry.'

" Peace between Russia and Japan had been arranged and signed under the patronage of President Roosevelt.

E

"Staying that autumn with my brother-in-law, Tom Duff, I met Randall Davidson,* who wrote for me the following rhyme upon Roosevelt composed by an American:

A wee bit of Lincoln but not very much of him
A dash of Lord Cromer but only a touch of him,
Kitchener, Bismarck and Germany's 'Will,'
Chamberlain, Jupiter, Buffalo Bill.

. . . . . .

From my Diary, November, 1905

"The Unionist majority was getting shakier every day and the political situation developed rapidly. On Monday the 13th of November Henry came into my bedroom at Cavendish Square, where I was having my hair washed, and told me that he had seen Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman.

"Hearing this I could not wait, but tying a shawl round my head ran down to the library, where I sat down on one of the leather arm-chairs. Henry walked up and down the room and told me all he could remember of his talk with C.B.

"He found him in his library in Belgrave Square looking at a newspaper called *The Week's Survey*, which he asked Henry if he had ever heard of.

"Henry replied that he had not. They then proceeded to discuss Russia and Germany. Henry was glad to find him sound on Germany. He dislikes the Kaiser and thinks him a dangerous, restless, mischief-making man.

"Suddenly he said that he thought things looked like coming to a head politically, and that any day after Parliament met we might expect a General Election. He gathered that he would probably be the man the King would send for, in which case he would make no phrases but would consent to form a Government.

"Henry said: 'C.B. then looked at me and said: "I do not think we have ever spoken of the future Liberal

* The Archbishop of Canterbury.

From my Diary, November, 1905

Government, Asquith? What would you like? The Exchequer, I suppose?"—I said nothing—"or the Home Office?" I said, "Certainly not." At which he said: "Of course, if you want legal promotion what about the Woolsack? No? Well then, it comes back to the Exchequer. I hear that it has been suggested by that ingenious person, Richard Burdon Haldane,* that I should go to the House of Lords, a place for which I have neither liking, training nor ambition. In this case you would lead the House of Commons. While Lord Spencer was well and among us, nothing under Heaven would have made me do this! Nothing except at the point of the bayonet. Spencer and I talked it over, and he was quite willing that I should go to the House of Lords."'

"C.B. then went on to say what a generous fine old fellow Lord Spencer was, but that he feared he would never again be able to take office; should he, however, recover sufficiently, he might be in the Cabinet without a portfolio and asked Henry what he thought of the idea.

"I could see that the impression left upon Henry's mind while he was telling me of this conversation was that it would be with reluctance and even repugnance that Campbell-Bannerman would ever go to the House of Lords.

"C.B. then asked my husband who he thought best fitted for the Home Office; to which Henry replied that that depended upon who would have the Woolsack, and added:

"'For that, my dear C.B., there are only two possible people, Haldane or Reid,'† and went on to say that Reid had told him in past days that he did not fancy leaving the House of Commons; 'in which case,' said Henry, 'why not give him the Home Office and Haldane the Woolsack?'

"C.B. answered, 'Why not *vice versa*?'

"When Henry told me this—knowing as I do that Haldane had set his heart on being Lord Chancellor, I

* Viscount Haldane of Cloan. † Lord Loreburn.

From my Diary, November, 1905

was reminded of George Eliot's remark, 'When a man wants a peach it is no good offering him the largest vegetable marrow,' but I merely said that I hoped Haldane would not stand out if Reid desired the Woolsack. He went on to tell me that C.B. had then said:

"'There are two more delicate offices we've not mentioned, Asquith—the Colonial and the Foreign Office.'

"Henry said he thought Edward Grey* should have the Foreign Office; C.B. answered that he had considered Lord Elgin for this, but Henry was very strong upon Grey. He said that he was the *only* man, and that it was clear in his mind that Grey's appointment as Foreign Minister would be popular all over Europe. He expatiated at great length and convincingly on Grey's peculiar fitness for a post of such delicacy.

"C.B. said he wanted him for the War Office, but Henry told me—having been unshakable upon this point—he felt pretty sure that he had made an impression, as C.B. ultimately agreed that Lord Elgin would do well in the Colonial Office.

"Henry ended our talk by saying to me:

"'I could see that C.B. had never before realized how urgently Grey is needed at the Foreign Office and I feel pretty sure that he will offer it to him.'

"I said Grey could fill with equal success at least six places in the Government, including a noble appearance as Viceroy of India."

End of Diary quotation

Although possessed of many of the qualities for which he was deservedly popular, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman differed fundamentally from the public conception of him, and he was fortunate in having Mr. Balfour as a political foil; they not only fought with very different weapons, but, with the exception of fine manners, two men of more different type, temper, and training could not have been imagined.

* Viscount Grey of Fallodon.

SIR HENRY CAMPBELL-BANNERMAN AND MR. ASQUITH.

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"C.B." (as he was called) was as much stimulated as Mr. Balfour was irritated by his opponent, and, considering the inequality of their intellect, they made a fair duel. Sir Henry's patent sincerity constantly pierced the armour of Mr. Balfour's insolent detachment, and the Tories who took him to be a guileless person found themselves confronted by an unforeseen combination of pawkiness and courage.

No one can become Prime Minister of this country without having exceptional qualities; and, in spite of being easy-going to the point of laziness, Sir Henry had neither lethargy nor indifference. He recoiled from what was not straight, and had a swift and unerring insight into his fellow-men.

A certain lack of dignity prevented him from ever carrying much authority in the House of Commons, and he was always nervous about his health; but his modesty and good humour endeared him to all, and he was both loved and trusted.

As the principal characters concerned in the events that took place after the fall of the Balfour Ministry—Lord Grey, Lord Haldane and my husband—are alive, I cannot write freely about them, but it is well known that Lord Grey and Lord Haldane wanted Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman to be Prime Minister in the House of Lords, and my husband to lead the Commons, and were loth to accept Office under any other arrangement, so I shall be betraying no secrets by writing of the discussions which took place over the matter.

It is difficult to imagine any of the prominent politicians of the present day showing the same qualities of straightness or simplicity that were shown by Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, Edward Grey, and my husband in these transactions. Their behaviour would have been remarkable at any period; but writing as I am in the Autumn of 1921, when there is a lack of straightness, Statesmanship and manners in high places, it appears to

me that those negotiations mark the end of the great political traditions of the 19th century.

On the 4th of December, 1905, the night before Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman kissed hands with King Edward, he had an interview with Sir Edward Grey, in which the latter had put his own situation with painful fidelity before him, and on the morning of the 5th C.B. sent for Henry to talk things over before he went to the Palace.

I will here quote from my diary:

From my Diary, December 5th, 1905

"On the 5th December, 1905, C.B. and Henry had a moving interview. *No* one could have been straighter and nicer than Campbell-Bannerman was to him. He told him of the talk he had had the night before with Sir Edward Grey. He spoke well of him, but said he was a regular Grey and had all the defects of his qualities He added that he (C.B.) was well aware that Henry was better equipped to lead the House of Commons than he was; that he easily recognised this; but that, after standing all the stress and strain of the last few years, he did not wish people to say that he had run away when the pinch came—he could not bear the idea that anyone should think he was a coward.

"Henry answered that the position was almost too delicate and personal for them to discuss; but C.B. pressed him to say frankly everything that was in his mind. Henry pointed out what a fearful labour C.B. would find the combination of leading the House and being Prime Minister, as they were practically two men's work; that no one could possibly accuse him of being a coward; that the House of Lords was without a leader, and that it was placing him (Henry) in a cruel and impossible position if under the circumstances Edward Grey refused to take Office; he was his dearest friend as well as supporter, and to join a Government without such a friend would be personal pain to him, as they had never worked apart from one another.

From my Diary, December 5th, 1905

"Henry left after this as the King was to see Sir Henry at a quarter to eleven; he said he would return when C.B. had kissed hands.

When they met after the interview C.B. told him His Majesty had been most amiable and expressed himself delighted at hearing he would undertake to form a Government. He warned him, however, by saying that being Prime Minister and leading the Commons at the same time would be heavy work, and added:

"'We are not as young as we were, Sir Henry!'

"He suggested he should go to the House of Lords, to which C.B. seems to have answered that no doubt he would ultimately be obliged to do this, but that he would prefer starting in the Commons if only for a short time. The King, instead of pushing the matter—which was what I would have liked—seemed to fall in very pleasantly with the idea and shook him warmly by the hand. Knowing that he ought to kneel and kiss hands, C.B. advanced and waited, but the King interrupted by some commonplace remark; when he had finished speaking, C.B. again advanced meaning to kneel, but the King only wrung his hand, at which he felt the interview was over, as to have had another try would have been grotesque. He retired from the presence of His Majesty to Lord Knollys's room and told him he feared he had never kissed hands at all, to which Lord Knollys replied that it did not matter, as he would see that it was properly published and in the right quarter the next day.

"When Henry had finished telling me all this I could see by his face how profoundly anxious he was. He had left C.B. saying that as the matter was one of vital importance to him personally it could not be settled in a day, and that he must be given time to think things over.

"On December the 6th, Violet and I went to Hatfield in the afternoon, and Henry arrived later on the same day. He went straight to his room, where I joined him, and we talked for an hour before dressing for dinner.

SIR EDWARD GREY
Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs

SIR H. CAMPBELL BANNERMAN
Prime Minister and First Lord of the Treasury.

THE RT. HON. H. H. ASQUITH
Chancellor of the Exchequer.

THE MARQUIS OF RIPON
Lord Privy Seal.

THE RT. HON. R. B. HALDANE
Secretary of State for War.

THE EARL OF ELGIN
Secretary of State for the Colonies.

THE RT. HON. JOHN BURNS
President of the Local Government Board.

SIR ROBERT REID
Lord Chancellor.

THE RT. HON DAVID LLOYD GEORGE
President of the Board of Trade.

SIR HENRY CAMPBELL-BANNERMAN AND HIS CABINET, 1906

From my Diary, December 5th, 1905

He told me that he had seen John Morley that day who had been wonderfully nice and clever throughout the troubles; that C.B. had spoken to him (Morley) at great length about Edward Grey, of his character and of their interview, and that Morley had ended by saying:

"'C.B. is not a big man; he should either have ordered Grey out of the room after this, as Mr. Gladstone would have done, or accepted Grey's alternative suggestion.' C.B. had told John Morley how touched he had been at Henry's wonderful delicacy in presenting the case for him (C.B.) to go to the House of Lords.

"In this connection I may say Henry is always considerate; of course, this could hardly be a test case as he could not very well have asserted his superior qualities for the leadership, but Henry has sensibility for other people's feelings to a greater degree than anyone that I have ever known. He realizes what will make for peace, and, having no vanity or wish to give his enemy a pat, he can deal with the most subtle situations as if they were of no personal interest to him. Edward Grey is not only perfectly fearless but prides himself upon his own characteristics. He wants nothing for himself but would like Henry to lead the House of Commons and Haldane to be Lord Chancellor.

"Henry ended by telling me he had gone himself to see Grey after his conversation with Morley and had found him in an uncompromising three-cornered humour.

"That night at dinner at Hatfield, my husband looked worn out, and I admired him more than I could say for throwing himself into the social atmosphere of a fancy ball, with his usual simplicity and unselfcentredness.

"On Wednesday (the 6th of December) we motored to London. Henry went at once to see C.B. and Herbert Gladstone came to talk over the whole situation with me. Herbert told me that he himself had urged C.B. to go to the House of Lords and thus remove all difficulties;

From my Diary, December 5th, 1905

that he had impressed upon him how hard his father had found combining the Office of Prime Minister and Leader of the House; but C.B. had answered that his wife was to arrive from Scotland at seven that night and that she would be the final arbiter; at which Herbert had left him to come to me, feeling pretty sure that he *would* go to the Lords. Hearing that Herbert had been given the Admiralty I congratulated him and asked him if there would be any objection to Haldane going to the War Office since the Woolsack was disposed of by Reid's acceptance.

"I said that every soldier I had seen was keen upon his appointment. He did not answer this, but said he had heard nothing definite about the Admiralty for himself; and after this he left me.

"Herbert Gladstone is not only the oldest of my friends but one of the best, straightest and most loyal of men.

"I returned to Hatfield that evening where Henry joined me. He was much moved in relating what had occurred during the day. In view of Edward Grey's difficulty in joining the Government he had done what he never thought possible—he had been to C.B. and made a great personal appeal to him.

"HENRY (to me): 'I said, "It is no use going over the ground again, my dear C.B. I make a personal appeal to you, which I've never done before; I urge you to go to the House of Lords and solve this difficulty." I could see that C.B. was moved, but he repeated what you tell me he said to Herbert Gladstone about the arrival of his wife, and that he wished her to be the final arbiter; with which our interview ended.'

"The next evening at Hatfield (7th of December) when Henry arrived I saw at a glance that it was all up. He told me that C.B. had said to his secretary, Sinclair,* that morning at breakfast that he had had a talk with his lady the night before, and that she had said:

* Lord Pentland.

" ' *No surrender.*' From my Diary

" ' I don't often make up my mind, Sinclair, but I've done it now—I shan't go to the Lords.'

" After Sinclair had told him this Henry went to see C.B.

" HENRY (to me) : ' He looked white and upset and began like a man who, having taken the plunge, meant to make the best of it. He spoke in a rapid, rather cheerful and determined manner : " I'm going to stick to the Commons, Asquith, so will you go and tell Grey he may have the Foreign Office and Haldane the War Office." '

" We left Hatfield the next day, and, opening the *Times* in the train, read that Sir Edward Grey had definitely refused to join the Government. From my Diary, December 8th, 1905

" On arriving at 20 Cavendish Square we seized our letters.

" Henry had a line from Haldane :

" ' *7th December*, 1905.

" ' MY DEAR A.,

" ' I have talked the question over with E.G. and have induced him to reconsider his position as regards taking the F.O. He is to see C.B. in the morning.

" ' My decision will follow his after he has seen C.B.

" ' Ever yours affectly,

" ' R. B. H.'

" After reading this Henry left me and went to see Lord Haldane. At 12 o'clock Herbert Gladstone came into my boudoir, his face shining with happiness ; he opened his arms and said :

" ' It's all right, Margot ! '

" ' Not possible ! ' I exclaimed.

" HERBERT : ' Yes—Grey and Haldane are both in

From my Diary, December 8th, 1905

and the two men that deserve gold medals are Spender* and Acland.'†

"Herbert could hardly speak of Henry's conduct throughout the whole anxious week without emotion, and ended by saying:

"'You have done nobly throughout, Margot, and I've been much struck by your wisdom and generosity.' At which I burst into tears.

"So we were all in, and not *one* of us had got what we wanted! I sent a telegram to Louis Malet‡ at the Foreign Office, which I had promised to do:

"'Settled Maria'; and this is his answer:

"'Thank you and God. Suspense awful. Malet.'

"The Foreign Office adore Edward Grey and were in a state of trembling anxiety lest he should stand out. Both Reggie Lister§ and Louis Malet had made me promise to wire to them the moment I knew of Grey's final decision. I suggested that 'Maria' would be a wiser signature than 'Margot.'

"This is what Grey wrote in answer to a line from me:

"'Fallodon,
"'*December* 11*th*, 1905.

"'Dear Mrs. Asquith,

"'My bolt is shot. . . . As to the Government, the only declarations of Policy which count are those of the Prime Minister; having entered his Government my statements will be in line with his as long as I am in it.

"'There is no difficulty about this, for my views as to what should be done in the next Parliament are not different from his, but he must state them in his own way

"'Yours sincerely,
"'E. Grey.'

* Mr. Alfred Spender, Editor of the *Westminster Gazette*.
† Mr. Arthur Acland, Minister of Education.
‡ Sir Louis Malet.
§ The Hon. Reginald Lister.

From my Diary, December 11th, 1905

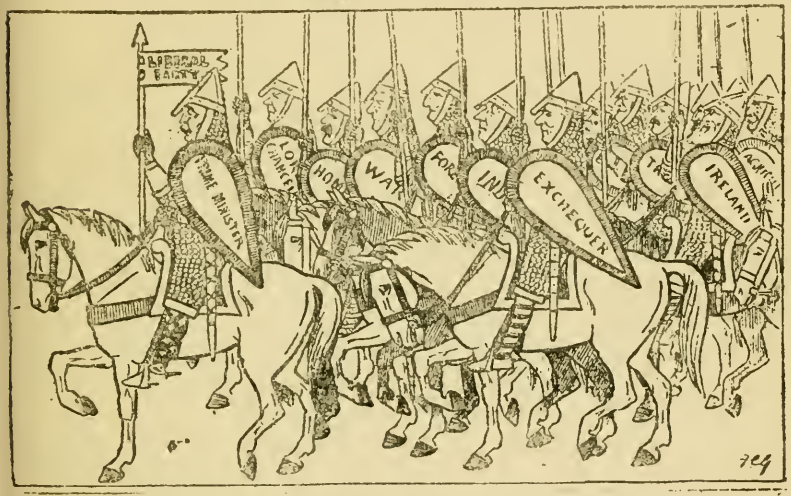
"On the 11th of December our new Ministry was published in all the papers. I looked down the list and my eye rested upon :

"'*Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Asquith.*'

"On the 12th I went to see my father and found him far from well, which filled me with sadness. He asked me how I liked the idea of going to 11 Downing Street and letting my own house. I told him that I would

DECEMBER 12, 1905.

IN BATTLE ARRAY.



THE OUTGOING OF THE CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT.
Reproduced by kind permission of the "Westminster Gazette."

either have to farm out my own, or my stepchildren, as there was no room for both a nursery and a schoolroom at No. 11.

"He was most dear and generous and said that he would pay us the rent which we hoped to get for 20 Cavendish Square to enable us to live there, and in consequence we have lent 11 Downing Street to the Herbert Gladstone's, who have no London house.

"On the 21st of December I received a letter from Lord Hugh Cecil, in which he says :

"'The new Government makes a good show, better than the late one; the weak spot in this Government is the Prime Minister, in the last it was the one strong point. I don't think you have lost much by taking Office. My guess is that your party will come back 230—giving you a majority of about 40 over us and the Irish together.'

. . . . . .

From my Diary, Jan. 8th, 1906

"On January the 8th, 1906, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman's election address was published in the papers. It was quite good, but not as striking as Robespierre's, which I read the other day:

"'Our purpose is to substitute morality for egoism, honesty for honour, principles for usages, duties for proprieties, the empire of reason for the tyranny of fashion; dignity for insolence, nobleness for vanity, love of glory for the love of lucre, good people for good society, merit for intrigue, genius for brilliance, the charm of contentment for the satiety of pleasure, the majesty of man for noble lineage, a magnanimous, powerful and happy people for an amiable, frivolous and wretched people: that is to say every virtue of a Republic that will replace the vices and absurdities of a Monarchy.'

"On Sunday the 14th we heard that Arthur Balfour's seat and all the others at Manchester had been won by Liberals, and after that I knew that we were safe.

"The results of the General Election were that the Liberals had an immense majority—Liberals 379—Labour 51—Nationalists 83—and the Unionists 155.

"I won £150 in bets that I had taken with Edgar Vincent, Jack Poynder and others the week of Chamberlain's first speech on Protection, made on the 15th of May, 1903, as I prophesied that the whole country would revolt against any such folly.

"I congratulated Mr. Chamberlain on his gains in Birmingham, and he answered me in this letter:

TELEGRAMS TO KINGSHEATH.

Highbury,
Moor Green,
Birmingham.

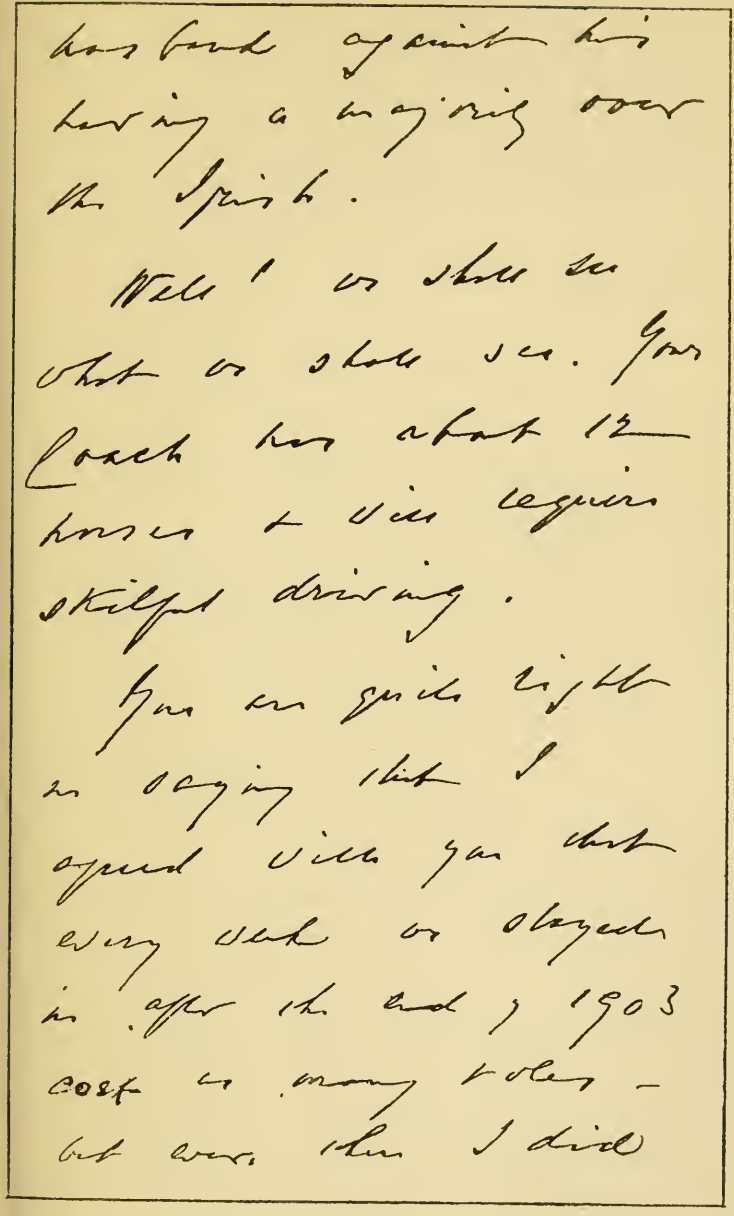
Jan. 23. 06

My dear Mrs. Asquith

You at least have the magnanimity the absence; which I thought I detected in our great Prime Minister. Many thanks for your congratulations. We have done well today in Handsworth & in Austin's division, &

altogether we are rather
pleased with useless
here.

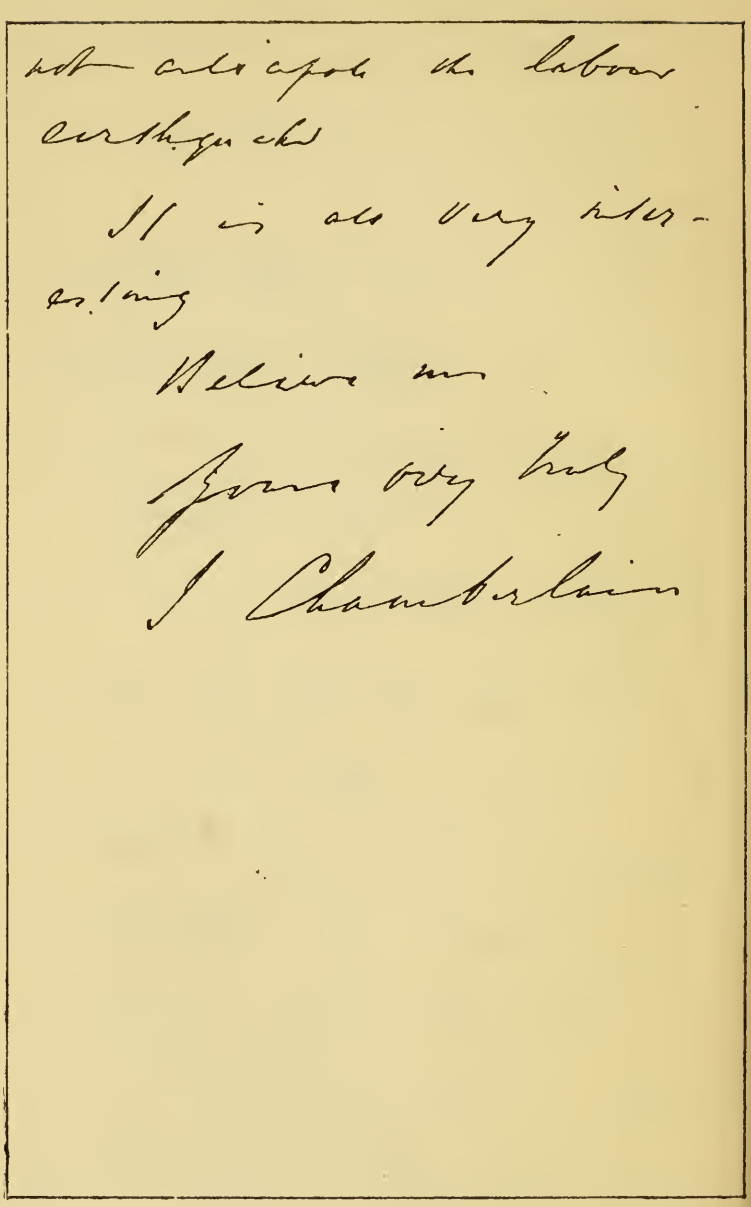
But what a smash!
For mes I was quite
out in my estimate
& it was only the
interruption of Horace
Farquhar at Windsor
that has saved me
sixteen that I was
about to bet with your



husband against his
having a majority over
the Irish.

Well! we shall see
what we shall see. Your
Coach has about 12
horses & will require
skilful driving.

You are quite right
in saying that I
agreed with you that
every week we stayed
in after the end of 1903
cost us many votes —
but even then I did



not anticipate the labour
earthquake

It is all very inter-
esting

Believe me

Yours very truly

J Chamberlain

From my Diary, 1906

"When the final figures of the Elections were published everyone was stunned, and it certainly looks as if it were the end of the great Tory party as we have known it.

"In discussing the results of this amazing General Election with Henry, I said that Balfour's and Chamberlain's minds were too different ever to work well together, and that it had been an unfortunate alliance. He answered: 'Joe drives further, but Arthur beats him at the short game.'

"'It ought to have been the strongest of combinations,' I said; to which he replied:

"'Unfortunately they have both been in a bunker for the last three years.'

"The Press published a correspondence expressing divided opinions as to the reasons of the smash. Half the letters said that the Elections were not fought on Fiscal Reform, and the other half dwelt upon the unsatisfactory Leadership of the Unionist Party. Mr. A. Gibbs gave up his seat to Arthur Balfour in the City, which he accepted, and then the scrimmage began! the *Morning Post* and other papers of the same complexion loudly protesting against the future Opposition being led by Mr. Balfour unless he accepted the full Chamberlain policy. On February the 8th, Lord Ridley received a letter from Mr. Chamberlain, which he published in the *Times*. At the end of it he said:

> "'You will see by this long letter that there is no question of repudiating the leadership of Mr. Balfour or of putting undue pressure upon him to abandon his opinions or his friends. On the other hand Tariff Reformers sincerely believe in their principles, and cannot expect to put them aside to suit the exigencies of party wire-pullers. They are ready to work with their Unionist colleagues for common objects, but they cannot accept a policy of inaction and mystification with regard to the main object of their political life, convinced as they are that in the acceptance

From my Diary, February, 1906

of a full measure of Tariff Reform lies the best hope for the future success of the party.'

"A meeting of the Unionist party was held immediately after this at Lansdowne House, which brought the leaders into line.

"Letters from Mr. Balfour and Mr. Chamberlain appeared simultaneously in the papers of the 15th, in which the former for the first time announced that he was in favour of a tax upon food:

> "'The establishment of a moderate general tariff on manufactured goods, not imposed for the purpose of raising prices or giving artificial protection against legitimate competition, and the imposition of a small duty on foreign corn.'

"When I read this in the *Times* of that morning I felt sad. It is always unwise to prophesy how long a party in Parliament with such a vast majority as ours will last; complications are sure to arise, and with the German Emperor in his present temper even war might break out; but one prophecy I will make and that is that Arthur Balfour is politically finished. His brain will be glorious in Opposition, a feast of intellectual fun and retort, but as a political power he is a spent force.

"I went to the Leo Rothschilds' for the week-end, leaving Henry to dine with the King. He joined me on the Sunday.

"The Edgar Vincents, Maguires, Dick Cavendishes and Duke of Devonshire were there. Mrs. Leo is an alert, clever hostess and her husband has a sweet and generous nature. All the Rothschilds are keen about politics, and angels of kindness.

"Leo spoke to me strongly about South Africa; he thought Henry's speech on the 24th had been too severe upon the question of the Chinese and that we should shake the confidence of the country by not guaranteeing enough Labour, or safeguarding the loyal vote of our new Constitution.

"Henry's speech had made a considerable sensation not only among the Opposition but among some of our own people who had shares in the South African mines."*

From my Diary, February 26th, 1906

"On February the 26th I went down to hear Lord Milner's maiden speech upon South Africa in the House of Lords. It lacked grandeur and flexibility and left me with a feeling of dryness. Bitter as he may feel he should have avoided the past, and delivered his warning with the authority of a great experience, instead of which what he said was neither wise nor temperate.

"If there was a good case for the Boer War it was indifferently put, and I doubt if a single nation understood it.

"Our Government will doubtless have to pursue its own course and cleanse the whole thing up without listening to anybody.† They will have the Press and the West End of London as well as masses of the big and small shareholders against them, and create a bitterness of feeling which will hardly be allayed in my lifetime, but the country will be built up slowly, and will gradually emerge strong and stable.

"I felt annoyed that the first thing that happened in the new Government was a Vote of Censure upon Lord

* Writing now, it is difficult to remember the violent opposition that there was to the South African Constitution. People said then as they say about Ireland to-day: "How can you trust an avowed enemy of England?" There were as many conflicting parties in South Africa at that time as there are in Ireland to-day and a much smaller majority for self-government in the country governed. There had been a war in which 22,450 of our men had been killed, and after this to give the Boers back their freedom seemed unthinkable to the average mind. People who came to see me said their sons had died in vain if we granted freedom to the Boers. The same silly things were said then that are said now. It appears to be a belief common to human nature that War is a failure unless the Peace declared after it is inspired by Revenge or Fear; I observed it in 1906 and it has been painfully evident all over the world since the Armistice of 1918. There is no limit to the powers of self-deception in human beings, and the belief that you can wage war to end war is as erroneous as the illusion that keeping a large army will preserve peace.

† Lord Kitchener when saying good-bye to me before going to India said:

"Well, Mrs. Asquith, I have finished with South Africa, but I will give a word of advice to anyone who has to deal with it in the future: If you listen to the Loyalists you are done."

From my Diary, February, 1906

Milner by a member of the rank and file, to which our front bench moved an amendment saying that though they disapproved of flogging in the mines we objected strongly to the censuring of individuals. Though this amendment was carried by a large majority, it was moved by Winston in an ungenerous, patronising and tactless speech. Milner had already acnkowledged and regretted the flogging of Chinamen, and what Winston said is calculated to hurt and offend everyone.

"Milner came to see me on the 28th of March, and we had a long talk; he was wonderfully nice and absolved us from what was more than 'a regrettable Parliamentary incident.' I watched him as he sat upon the sofa with his mild, slightly donnish eyes, narrow rather bureaucratic views, fine character and distinguished address, and wondered what it was that had produced the violence of his mind; as an intellectual machine it appears to be as good as Arthur Balfour's, but there is something out of drawing with his judgment. He has got it on the brain that we shall lose South Africa, and everything that he writes and says upon the subject points to the idea that if you wish to maintain supremacy you must encourage hate.

"I went to the House of Lords to hear the debate inaugurated by Lord Halifax as a counterblast to Winston's foolish attack upon Milner. Lord Loreburn made a remarkable speech; the House of Lords suits him better than the House of Commons.

"Mr. Hilaire Belloc wrote the following poem, which he dedicated to Lord Halifax:

VERSES TO A LORD WHO, IN THE HOUSE OF LORDS, SAID THAT THOSE WHO OPPOSED THE SOUTH AFRICAN ADVENTURE CONFUSED SOLDIERS WITH MONEY-GRUBBERS.

You thought because we held, my lord,
An ancient cause and strong,
That therefore we maligned the sword:
My lord, you did us wrong.

From my Diary, February 1906

We also know the sacred height
Up on Tugela side,
Where those three hundred fought with Beit
And fair young Wernher died.

The daybreak on the failing force,
The final sabres drawn :
Tall Goltman, silent on his horse,
Superb against the dawn.

The little mound where Eckstein stood
And gallant Albu fell,
And Oppenheim, half-blind with blood,
Went fording through the rising flood—
My lord, we know them well.

The little empty homes forlorn,
The ruined synagogues that mourn,
In Frankfort and Berlin ;
We knew them when the peace was torn—
We of a nobler lineage born—
And now by all the gods of scorn
We mean to rub them in.

" The Winston-Byles debate over Milner filled me with dejection. I do not see Henry's chance in this House of Commons under Campbell-Bannerman in spite of our huge majority. The fluctuating mind and uninspiring personality of our Prime Minister cannot impress others and is not easily impressed.

. . . . . .

From my Diary, June, 1906

" On the 3rd of June we were staying at Littlestone-on-Sea when I received a letter from my father written from Broadoaks, Weybridge, and on the 6th I heard of his death.

" He was buried in Traquair Kirk on the 8th and we all travelled up from London the night before for the funeral.

" We arrived at Innerleithen Station on a characteristic Peebleshire morning—misty, pearly and windless, and followed the coffin at a foot's pace in covered carriages along the winding road leading to Traquair My mother,

From my Diary, June, 1906

Jack's wife, Helen, Laura and her little son, and all of us are buried in Traquair. I have knelt many times in the dark and said my prayers without disturbing the lambs huddled against the cross of Laura's grave and I love the churchyard. It is away from the noise of life, guarded by the Yarrow and the Tweed, and surrounded by the beckoning hills. I wondered as we stood by the open tomb that morning which of us would die next, and whether I would be buried in Traquair."

End of Diary quotation

CHAPTER V

Sir Campbell Bannerman's Death. 10 Downing Street. Windsor Castle. The Launch of the "Collingwood"

From my Diary, March, 1908

"On the 27th of March, 1908, Henry came into my room at 7.30 p.m. and told me that Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman had sent for him that day to tell him that he was dying. They had talked for over an hour, and Henry's voice shook as he repeated their conversation to me.

"C.B. began by telling him the text he had chosen out of the Psalms to put on his grave, and the manner of his funeral. He was resigned and even cheerful, but after a little while, with his strong immovability, he turned the subject deliberately on to material things, flimsy matters—such as patronage, titles and bishops, etc.

"He said that he had had a visit from the Archbishop of Canterbury which had given him great pleasure, and that one of the things Randall Davidson had said that had profoundly pleased him was, 'You are leaving us at a time when your name will be associated with the greatest measure* that any Party has ever brought forward in the Government of this or of any other country.' He looked at Henry steadily and added:

"'I have no illusions, Asquith; I know that the credit for this is yours, but we have talked it over many times together!'

"I told Henry I thought it wonderful that Randall

* The South African Constitution.

From my Diary, March, 1908

Davidson should have said just what he did; including C.B. in a movement that had required so much courage and provoked so much attack when the power of life was slowly leaving him, showed a true and feeling mind.

"Henry was deeply moved when he went on to tell me that Campbell-Bannerman had thanked him for being a wonderful colleague.

"'So loyal, so disinterested and so able.'

"At this I put my arms round his shoulder and we cried together. He continued:

"'C.B. all but broke down, and after struggling with a few brave tears said as I got up to leave the room:

"'"This is not the last of me; we will meet again, Asquith."'

"John Morley told Henry that when he had seen Campbell-Bannerman the latter had said to him:

"'Morley, you and I have not always seen eye to eye with Asquith, but we have never served with a greater gentleman.'

"A few days after this a new doctor was called in to No. 10, who told his patient that it would relieve him physically if he were to retire, and on Thursday, the 2nd of April, C.B. sent his letter of resignation to the King. He had felt too well at first to think that this was necessary, and he had become too ill later on for anyone to suggest it to him. The last time he saw Henry he said:

"'You are different from the others, Asquith, and I am glad to have known you. . . . God bless you!'

"The situation had become critical both for Henry and the Cabinet; the public was all agog and the House of Commons had degenerated into a gossip shop.

"Sir Arthur Godley* wrote this letter to me:

* Lord Kilbracken.

10. Downing Street.
Whitehall. S.W.

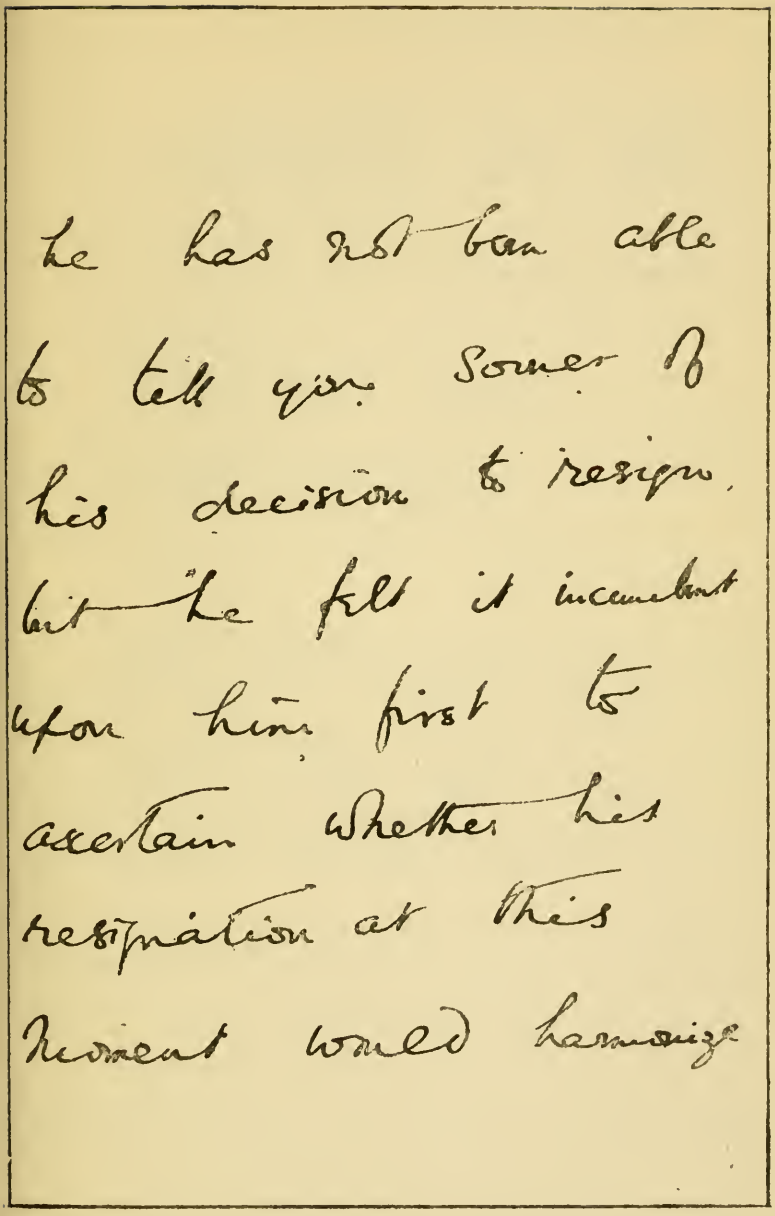
April. 5 1908.

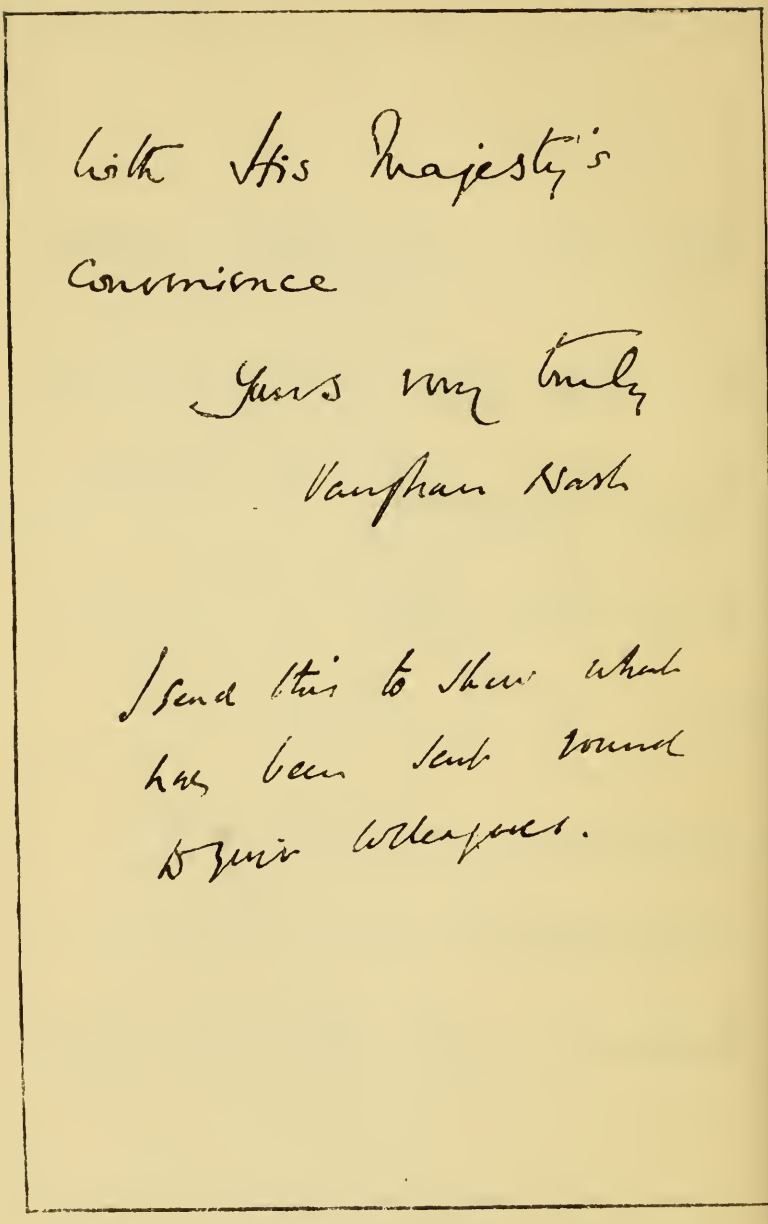
Dear Mr Asquith

Sir Henry desires me to let you know that he has been reluctantly compelled, owing to the state of his health, to tender his resignation

to the King, and that
His Majesty has, in
the circumstances, been
graciously pleased to
accept it.

Sir Henry wishes me
at the same time to
express his regret that


he has not been able
to tell you sooner of
his decision to resign,
but he felt it incumbent
upon him first to
ascertain whether his
resignation at this
moment would harmonize


With His Majesty's
Convenience
Yours very truly
Vaughan Nash

I send this to show what
has been sent round
to your colleagues.

From my Diary, March, 1908

" ' Milney Lodge, Farnborough, Hants,
" ' *29th of March*, 1908.

" ' My dear Margot,

" ' . . . What a strange weird time this is for all who are directly or indirectly concerned in politics ! John Morley described to me yesterday a visit he had paid to C.B. most interesting ; you can imagine how well J.M. would tell it. Meanwhile I am reminded of a passage in one of Sydney Smith's essays : " The sloth spends its life in trees " (he is reviewing a book on Natural History) "but, what is most extraordinary, he lives not *upon* the branches, but *under* them. He moves suspended, eats suspended, and passes his life in suspense like a young clergyman distantly related to a Bishop." Such is the situation of the Liberal Party at the present moment.

" ' Ever yours affectionately,
" ' Arthur Godley.'

" Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman's resignation having been accepted we expected to hear at any moment from the King.

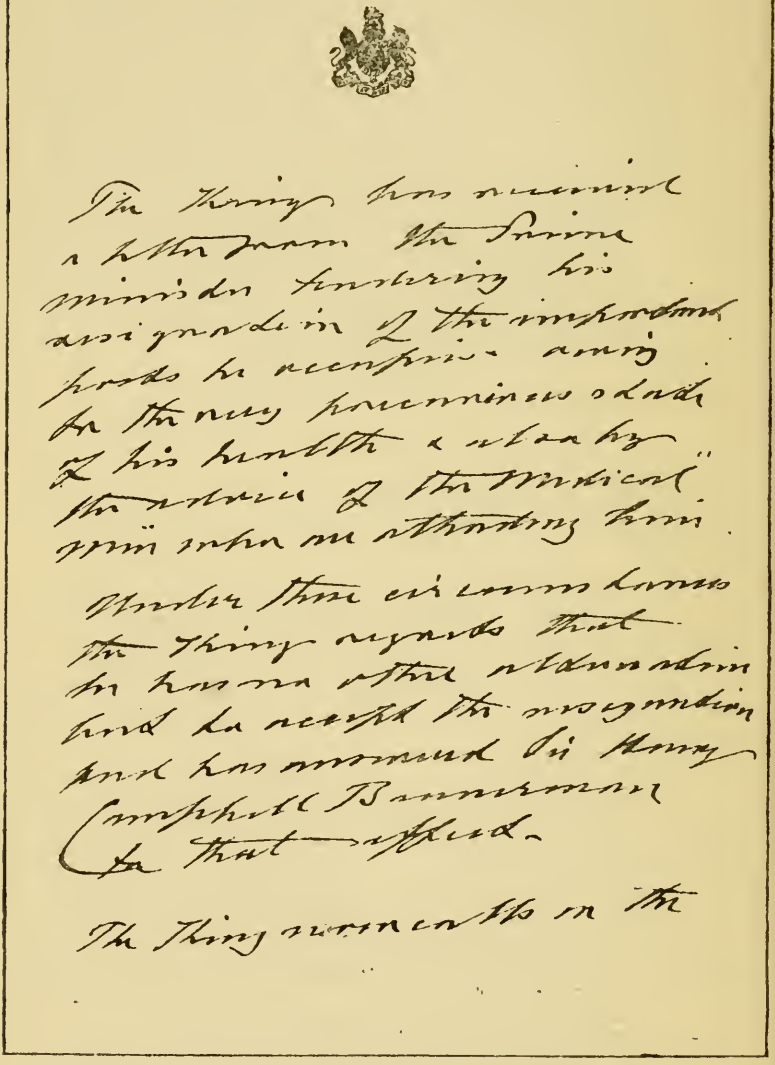
" At five o'clock in the evening of Sunday, the 6th of April, 1908, my husband received this letter from King Edward, and he left the same night for Biarritz.

" Miss Mahaffy was staying with us at the time and we dined early. In the course of conversation Henry said to me :

" ' Puffin* has the best manners of any of my children. I dream every night of my life as you know, and last night I dreamt that as I walked into the room I heard baby say, " I don't like old men," and seeing me he added, " I hope you don't think this applies to you, father." '

" Not feeling well enough to go to the station we parted on the doorstep and he waved to me out of the

* My son Anthony, who was then five and a half.



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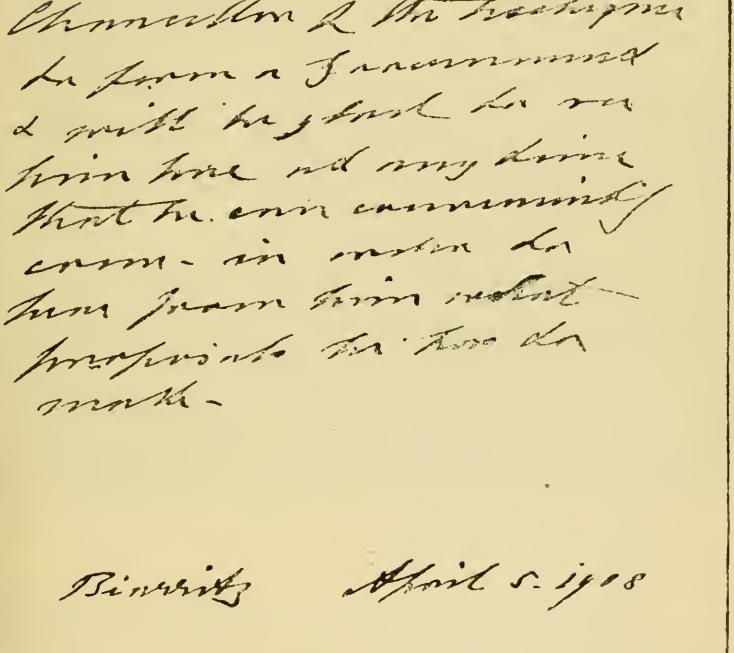


From my Diary, April, 1908

motor as it disappeared round the corner of the Square. On the 8th I received a wire from Biarritz :

" ' Have just kissed hands ; back Friday, ask Grey to dinner. Bless you. H.' And on the 10th I met him at Charing Cross.

" There was a dense crowd outside the station, and a large one on the platform. I shook hands with a few waiting friends, and observed a thousand Pressmen taking notes. When at last the train came in and room was made for me by the officials, I greeted Henry, and arm in arm we walked to our open motor, bowing through the crush of people all mad with enthusiasm, some even throwing flowers at us.

" We drove to 10 Downing Street, and I waited outside while Henry went in to enquire after Campbell-Bannerman.

" The street was empty, and but for the footfall of a few policemen there was not a sound to be heard.

" I looked at the dingy exterior of No. 10 and wondered how long we should live in it.

" Leaning back I watched the evening sky reflected in the diamond panes of the Foreign Office windows, and caught a glimpse of green trees. The door opened and the Archbishop came out.

" The final scene in a drama of Life was being performed in that quiet by-street. The doctor* going in and the priest coming out ; and as I reflected on the dying Prime Minister I could only hope that no sound had reached him of the crowd that had cheered his successor.

. . . . .

" On the 29th of April, 1908, a Party Meeting was held in the Reform Club to endorse Henry's Prime Ministership, at which the following resolution was moved :

" ' That this meeting of representatives of the Liberal Party in Parliament and the country most warmly welcomes the Right Hon. H. H. Asquith on

* Sir Thomas Barlow.

Edward R. & I.

HOTEL DU PALAIS BIARRITZ
DIRECTION PATTARD

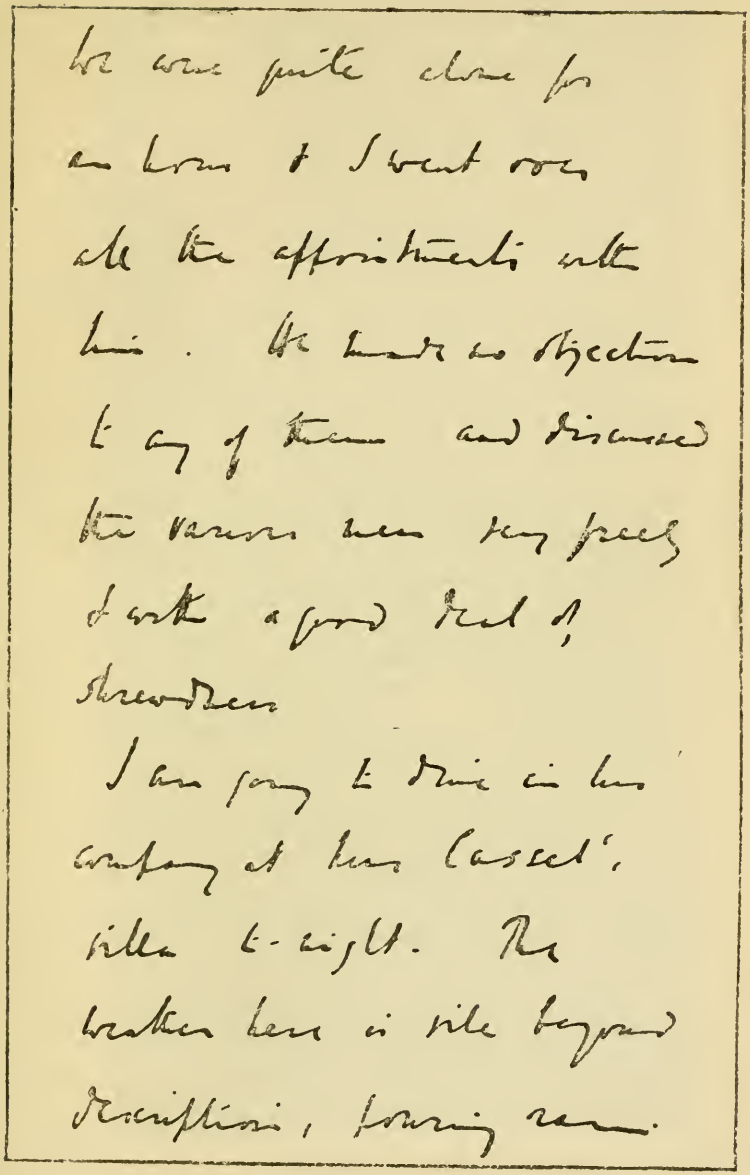
8 Sep 08

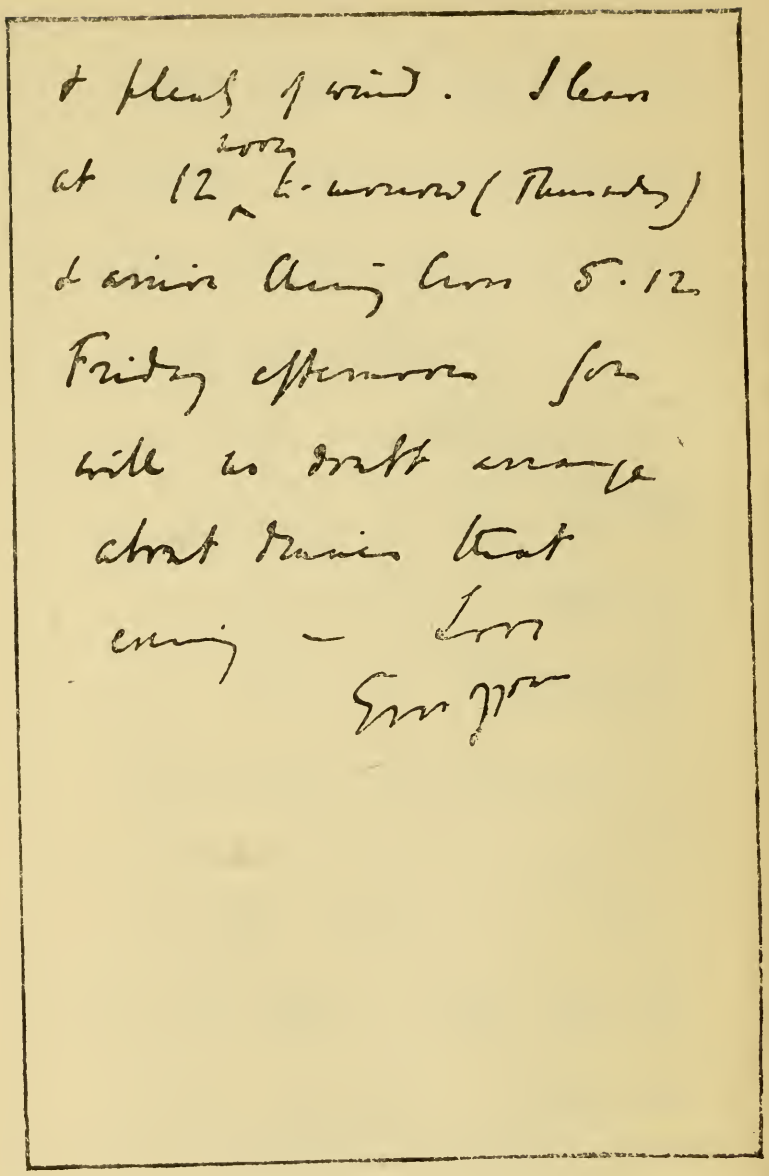
Darling — only time for a line. I saw Reggie Lister for a few minutes in Paris & then came on here by a train which got in about 1/4 past 10 last night. Freddy Ponsonby met me at the Station & I am comfortably lodged in the Henry's hotel.

This morning I put on

a frock coat, and escorted by Fritz & old Stanley Clarke went to the King who was similarly attired. I presented him with a written resignation of the Office of Ch^r of the Ex^r, & he then said 'I appoint you P.M. & 1st Lord of the Treasury' whereupon I knelt down & kissed his hand. Voilà tout!

He then asked me to come into the next room & breakfast with him





THE RT. HON. H. H. ASQUITH

his accession to the high post of First Minister of the Crown; expresses its ardent confidence that his strong sense in council, power in debate, and consummate mastery of all the habit and practice of public business are destined to carry triumphantly forward the good causes to which the Liberal Party is committed and the solid principles which it exists to supply and enforce; and it assures him and the Government of the unbroken continuance of loyal, steadfast, and zealous support in the many stout battles for the common good that now, as always, confront the Liberal Party and its leaders.'

From my Diary, April, 1908

"Henry admired the wording of this resolution so much that after showing it to me he asked me to guess who had written it. I told him that I had no idea; my mind was a blank.

"He said it was the finest compliment he had ever had paid to him, and added:

"'There is only one of our fellows I think who could have done it. It is obvious to me that John Morley wrote it.' It turned out that he was right."

End of Diary quotation

10 Downing Street, May 5th, 1908

When we moved into 10 Downing Street on the 5th of May, I could not help a feeling of sadness as I am faithful to a fault, and sensitively sentimental about my home. All the colour, furniture, grates, curtains, and every chair, table, and rug in Cavendish Square I had chosen myself. Houses like people should be individual; and though it is better to talk of a Queen Anne, Elizabethan, Jacobean or Georgian house than Sindlay, Lenygon, or Maple, I want people who come into a room to say this is "Frances Horner," "Annie Tennant," "Margot Asquith" or any of the people of taste.

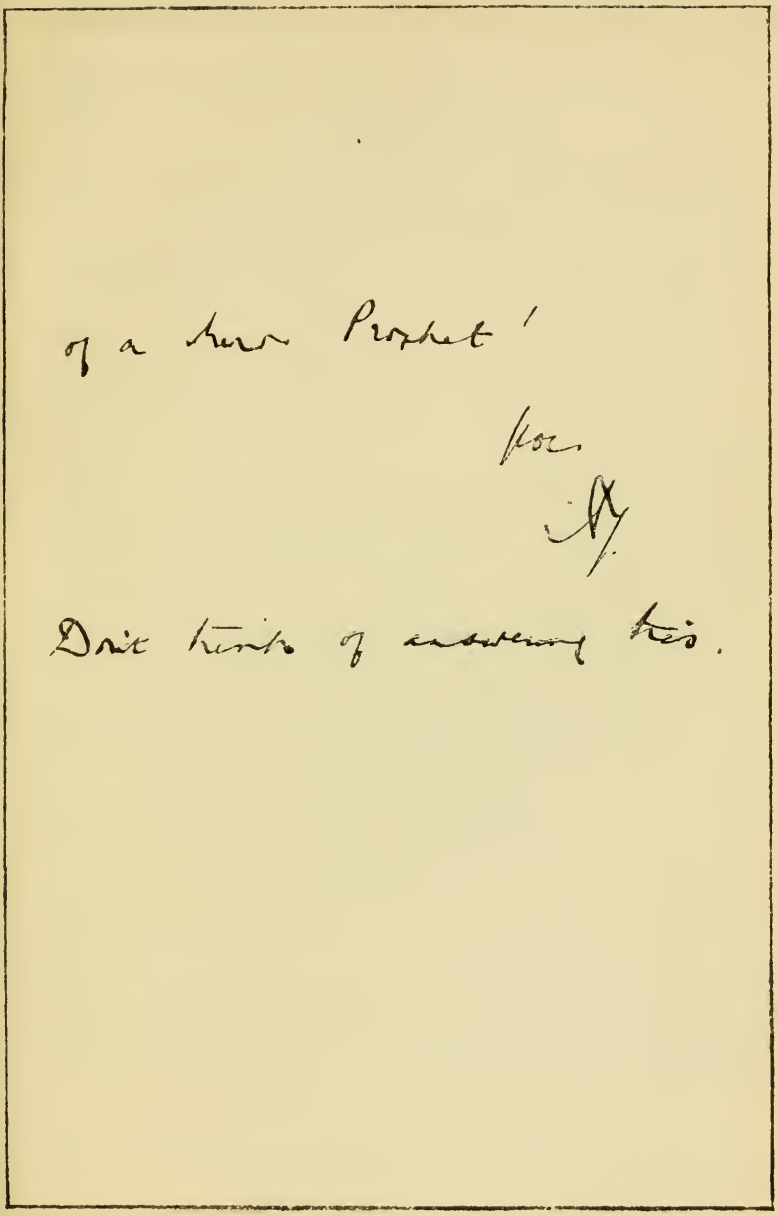
Rich men's houses are seldom beautiful, rarely comfortable, and never original. It is a constant source

April 6 / 08

38: Berkeley Square W.

My dear Asquith.

I must send you a line of hearty congratulation on the official announcement of today, and of sincere wishes for continued success. My prophecy of 1896 is at length verified, but it was so various and every turn I only felt the subdued complacency



10 Downing Street

of surprise to people of moderate means to observe how little a big fortune contributes to Beauty.

You may go to a house in which all that you are shown is priceless. You spend your day with fellow-guests in a chorus of praise touring till you are tired looking at pictures that are numbered, books that are autographed, furniture which is dated, and bronzes that are signed. Your host swallows with complacency in a circular smile all that is said, while punctuating the pauses with complaints of his own poverty.

"God knows!" he will say with a smile and a shrug, "how long any of us will be able to keep anything."

And the company is shocked when you suggest that the contents if sold of a single vitrine would square his bank-book.

You risk bursting a blood-vessel after dinner if you pull up a tapestry chair, and the beauty of the brocade is scant consolation when you retire to bed, for bells that bring no one, and lights by which you cannot read. It is a sure sign of lack of imagination if you do not make your guests comfortable, and money has never yet bought imagination.

It is the general atmosphere, colour and arrangement that makes a house beautiful, and there was little of this to console me in my new home.

10 Downing Street ought to be as well known in London as the Marble Arch or the Albert Memorial, but it is not. Although I lived there from April, 1908, till December, 1916, I nearly always had to tell my driver the way. I was taken to Down Street, Piccadilly, when I was sleepy or unobservant; or there was a risk of the children and umbrellas being thrown into the streets by the taxi-man opening the door suddenly from his seat and asking me where Downing Street was.

This historic house is in a quiet cul-de-sac off Whitehall and of such diffident architecture that the most ardent tourist would scarcely recognise it again.

LORD ROSEBERY

10 Downing Street, May 5th, 1908

Knowing as it did every Cabinet secret, and what was going on all over the world, I could not but admire the reserve with which 10 Downing Street treated the public. Even the Press while trying to penetrate the Prime Minister's heart was unable to divulge the secret of his home.

Liver-coloured and squalid, the outside of No. 10 gives but little idea to the man in the street of what it is really like.

Having been intimate with four Prime Ministers—Gladstone, Rosebery, Balfour and Campbell-Bannerman—I thought I knew what in the 'sixties was called "the Prime Minister's lodgings" pretty well; but when we went to live there I found I was wrong.

It is an inconvenient house with three poor staircases, and after living there a few weeks I made up my mind that owing to the impossibility of circulation I could only entertain my Liberal friends at dinner or at garden parties.

Having no bump of locality, soon after our arrival I left the drawing-room by one of the five doors and found myself in the garden instead of the hall. By the help of mildly lit telephones and one of the many messengers, I retraced my steps through a long and sepulchral basement, but I began to regret the light and air of my deserted home in Cavendish Square.

I will quote a sentence that I wrote in my diary about Number 10:

From my Diary

"I never knew what prevented anyone coming into this house at any moment: some would say after lunching with us that nothing had. There was a hall porter who looked after our interests when visitors arrived, but he was over-anxious and appeared flurried when spoken to. Poor man, he was never alone; he sat in his hooded chair, snatching pieces of cold mutton at odd hours; tired chauffeurs shared his picture paper, and strange

From my Diary

people—not important enough to be noticed by a secretary or a messenger—sat watching him on hard sills in the windows; or, if he were left for a moment, the baize doors would fly open and he would find himself faced by me, seeing a parson, a publican or a protectionist out of the house.

"But our porter was not a strong man, and any determined Baronet with hopes of favours to come about the time of the King's birthday could have penetrated into Number 10."

End of Diary quotation

10 Downing Street, 1908

The Board of Works, an admirably run office, and Lionel Earle—the most assiduous and capable of Civil servants as well as our excellent friend—set to work upon the house, and we were soon comfortably installed in it. The large garden was a joy to us, although a London garden is more delightful in theory than in practice. All my dresses were either torn or dirtied by disentangling Anthony's aeroplanes from the sooty shrubs; but the green trees and large spaces after the traffic of our Square were infinitely restful.

I amused King Edward by asking him one day if he would allow me to shoot some of his peacocks in St. James' Park as their Spring screams disturbed my early sleep.

The ivied wall was also a danger, and several of our Colleagues told me with what anxiety they had watched the athletic feats of my little son, which they could see from the windows of the Cabinet room.

Things started well for us in Parliament, and Henry's Colleagues were a perpetual study. Their moral and intellectual stature, as well as their appearances, manners and habits became extremely familiar to me, nor can I say I was far out in any of the predictions I made then upon their characters.

When John Morley heard that Winston Churchill was reading the lives of Napoleon he said:

MR. ASQUITH AND THAT CONFOUNDED No. 8.

(Even the Continent, if he had gone there for his holidays, would have afforded him no relief.)

[Reproduced by kind permission of 'Punch.'

'Most becoming, Sir!
It's a number H'EIGHT, Sir.'

'Wot's that a-strikin', Sir?
That's EIGHT bells, that is, Sir.'

'Aha! Monsieur Ask-huit! (Prime Minister winces.)
One vairy nice room, Sair. Nomber EIGHT—
ozzerwise nossing!!'

'That beastly number again! Oh, no it isn't; but I believe that wretched waiter knows something!!'

'CARICATURE OF MR. ASQUITH WHEN, AS PRIME MINISTER, HE WISHED TO INCREASE THE NAVY BY FOUR OR FIVE CAPITAL SHIPS. MR. CHURCHILL AND MR. LLOYD GEORGE WORKED TOGETHER AGAINST HIM WITH THE LITTLE ENGLAND PARTY IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS AND THE TORIES WANTED EIGHT DREADNOUGHTS. IT WAS A BURNING QUESTION.'

" He would do better to study the drab heroes of life. Framing oneself upon Napoleon has proved a danger to many a man before him."

He said this to me in a memorable talk soon after my husband became Prime Minister.

We were sitting in the garden at Flowermead discussing men and things. He spoke of his youth and how he had met Mrs. Morley first at a students' ball. We spoke of his early intellectual heroes—John Stuart Mill, Meredith and Carlyle.

" One day," he said, " I asked Carlyle what Mrs. John Stuart Mill had been really like, to which he answered : ' She was full of unwise intellect, asking and re-asking stupid questions.' "

We then got on to the different Gods that men worship and I told him that Arthur Balfour once said to me :

" If there is no future life this world is a bad joke ; and whose joke ? "

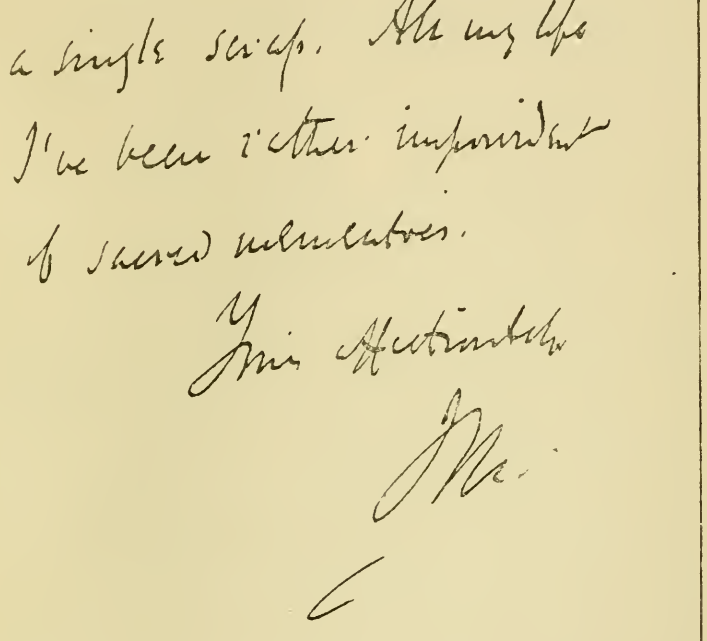
Although he is neither humble nor penitent, John Morley is a religious man who does not finish God in a phrase. He fights, gropes and aspires ; he is never dry or smug but always tender, humorous and understanding, and there is nothing fine that does not appeal to his feeling mind. I was glad that his peerage had made no stir. It is a far cry from " Honest John " to " Viscount Morley of Blackburn," but it excited no criticism. He is not only the most distinguished living Englishman, but a natural aristocrat. My husband called him a man of moods, but he is also a man of courage, sensitive to a fault, and responsive as a woman. An artist in conversation he can talk about himself without being self-centred. He is never obvious or predictable, and although easily flattered is an encouraging companion, as he can quote what you have said in former conversations if it has struck him as sound, and always responds to what is new or witty. I can truly say I would rather talk to him than to anyone I have ever met.

July 22 08.

India Office,
Whitehall S W

Yes — "close and frank and understanding." These words of yours exactly hit the mark. I was a trifle jaded when you came. When you went I was stimulated and refreshed more than I can say.

I never keep my own MS. I don't believe I've



"The noblest soul is the most
object of Compassion & hatte."

Bacon.

A memorial of long, affectionate, active, and always affectionate friendship from

John Russell.

When we left the garden and went into his library he showed me Bacon's saying inscribed in stone upon his mantelpiece: "The nobler a soul the more objects of compassion it hath."

After he had given me tea, I told him that Henry had appreciated the fine wording of the Resolution at the Party meeting that week, and had without difficulty guessed its authorship; this touched him visibly. We said good-bye to each other and with his usual affectionate courtesy he saw me off from the front door.

. . . . . .

I paid my first visit to Windsor Castle that year (June 20th, 1908), for though Henry had already been there and I had attended the big banquets I had never stayed in the Castle before.

You must be rather stupid or easily bewildered if you do not enjoy staying at Windsor Castle. There is something there for every taste; fine food and drinks, fine pictures, fine china, fine books, comfort and company.

I will quote what I wrote in my diary of this visit:

From my Diary, Windsor Castle, June 20th, 1908

"On the 20th of June, 1908, we motored Violet* to the garden party at Windsor, and after sending her back to London we walked up to the Castle. We turned in at the Lancastrian archway and were greeted by Sir Charles Frederick. Before going to rest, having been told that dinner was at 15 to 9, I examined the Prime Minister's apartments. They consist of two bedrooms, with marble baths attached to each; and a small sitting-room with large windows looking out upon the park. Hanging on a shiny grey and white wall-paper are indifferent portraits of Gladstone, Peel, Lord Cross, Melbourne and Disraeli. We found flowers on the tables and every kind of newspaper laid out for us to read.

"I wore a Parma-violet satin dress for dinner with long silver sashes and a kind of loose netting over the

* Lady Bonham Carter.

From my Diary, Windsor Castle, June 20th, 1908

skirt ; and at twenty minutes to nine Henry and I walked along the circular corridor gazing at the pictures as we passed the vermilion servants.

" I was taken in to dinner by my friend the Marquis de Soveral, the cleverest foreigner I have ever met, and I may say a remarkable man in any country.

" We assembled in a large uninteresting room—the ladies standing upon one side and the men upon the other while we awaited the entrance of the King.*

" The Castle party consisted of Gladys de Grey,† Alice Keppel,‡ Lady Savile, Lady Lowther and her husband, the Turkish Ambassador, John Morley, Edward Grey and Count Mensdorff.§

" The King and Queen were in high spirits and more than gracious to us. She looked divine in a raven's wing dress, contrasting with the beautiful blue of the Garter ribbon and her little head a blaze of diamonds.

" She chaffed me about the Suffragettes who had been pursuing us with true feminine and monotonous malignity.

" After dinner we played bridge—Grey and I, Mensdorff and Sir Gerald Lowther—while Henry played with the Queen ; and the King made a four with Alice Keppel, Lady Savile and the Turkish Ambassador.

" I am always happy with Sir Edward Grey and have a deep affection for him. His reality, thoughtfulness, and freedom from pettiness give him true distinction. He is unchangeable and there is something lonely, lofty and even pathetic about him which I could not easily explain.

" On Sunday the 21st I had hoped to have gone to St. George's Chapel, but the service was held in the Castle. After carefully pinning on a black hat, our page—a Dane of 75 or 80, who sits guarding our apartments on a chair in the passage—told me I was not to wear a hat, so I

* Edward VII.
† The Marchioness of Ripon.
‡ Mrs. George Keppel.
§ The Austrian Ambassador.

wrenched it off and fearing I should be late hastily joined the others in the gallery.

From my Diary, Windsor Castle, June 20th, 1908

" We heard a fine sermon upon men who justify their actions ; have no self-knowledge, and never face life squarely ; but I do not think many people listened to it.

" The King and Queen and Princess Victoria sat in a box above our heads and were faced by the Prince of Wales with his eldest boy and girl in the gallery opposite.*

" Gladys looked handsome, but seemed over-anxious. No one appeared to me to be quite at their ease in the presence of Their Majesties ; the fact is, if you do not keep a firm grip upon yourself on the rare occasions when you are with the rich and the great, you notice little and enjoy nothing.

" Royal persons are necessarily divorced from the true opinions of people that count, and are almost always obliged to take safe and commonplace views. To them, clever men are ' prigs ' ; clever women ' too advanced ' ; Liberals are ' Socialists ' ; the uninteresting ' pleasant ' ; the interesting ' intriguers ' ; and the dreamer ' mad.' But, when all this is said, our King devotes what time he does not spend upon sport and pleasure ungrudgingly to duty. He subscribes to his cripples, rewards his sailors, reviews his soldiers, and opens bridges, bazaars, hospitals and railway tunnels with enviable sweetness. He is fond of Henry, but is not really interested in any man. He is loyal to all his West End friends : female admirers, Jewish financiers and Newmarket bloods, and adds to fine manners rare prestige, courage and simplicity.

" The friend he confides most in is a ' short study ' but not a ' great subject.' E—— is a man of infinite curiosity and discretion, what the servants call ' knowing,' and has considerable influence at Court. His good spirits, fair judgment and frank address make him plausible and popular, and he has more intelligence than most of the Court pests. Slim with the slim, straight with

* King George, the Prince of Wales and Princess Mary.

From my Diary, Windsor Castle, June 20th, 1908

the straight, the fault I find with him is common to all courtiers, he hardly knows what is important from what is not.

" After lunching with the household I retired to my room leaving Henry talking to Morley and Grey.

" Our Dane informed me that we were to join Their Majesties in the Castle Courtyard at 4 o'clock to motor first to the gardens and then to Virginia Water, where we were to have tea. On my arrival in the courtyard the King came up to me and said :

" ' Where is the Prime Minister ? '

" Curtsying to the ground, I answered :

" ' I am sorry, Sir, but I have not seen him since lunch : I fear he cannot have got your command and may have gone for a walk with Sir Edward Grey.'

" His Majesty (angrily turning to his gentlemen-in-waiting, Harry Stonor and Seymour Fortescue) : ' What have you done ? Where have you looked for him ? Did you not give him my command ? '

" The distracted gentlemen flew about, but I could see in a moment that Henry was not likely to turn up, so I begged the King to get into his motor. He answered with indignation :

" ' Certainly not ! I cannot start without the Prime Minister, and it is only 10 minutes past 4.'

" He looked first at his watch and then at the Castle clock, and fussed crossly about the yard. Seeing affairs at a standstill I went up to the Queen and said I feared there had been a scandal at Court, and that Henry must have eloped with one of the maids of honour. I begged her to save my blushes by commanding the King to proceed, at which she walked up to him with her amazing grace, and, in her charming way, tapping him firmly on the arm pointed with a sweeping gesture to his motor and invited Gracie Raincliffe* and Alice Keppel to accompany him : at which they all drove off.

* The Countess of Londesborough.

VISCOUNT MORLEY AND MRS. ASQUITH
IN THE ROYAL GARDENS AT WINDSOR
(Photograph by Princess Victoria)

From my Diary, Windsor Castle, June 20th, 1908

"I waited about anxious to motor with John Morley, and finally followed with him and Lord Gosford. While we were deep in conversation Princess Victoria asked if she could take a kodak of us standing together. (She presented each of us with a copy a few days later.)

"When we returned to the Castle we found that Henry had gone for a long walk with the Hon. Violet Vivian, one of the Queen's maids of honour, over which the King was jovial and even eloquent."

End of Diary quotation

The year 1908 ended in an event which made a deep impression upon me.

The First Lord of the Admiralty asked me if I would launch the latest Dreadnought, and on the 7th of November Henry and I, Pamela McKenna and her lord, travelled by a special train to Devonport.

I wore my best garden-party dress; biscuit-coloured cloth with a clinging skirt, string blouse and winged hat of the same colour. Bouquets and addresses of welcome had been presented to us at every station on the journey, and we were met upon our arrival by Admiral Cross and other Naval officers. We drove through the decorated streets straight to the dockyard.

It was a brilliant blowing day, and on a dancing sea hundreds of crowded craft were bobbing about between the evil-looking battleships. I climbed up red cloth steps to a high platform, where the neighbours of distinction were collected under an awning. Clinging to my hat I kept my skirts down with difficulty. After receiving a bouquet and a water-colour of the ship, and making myself generally affable to the Admirals and Commanders, I looked up at the vast erection against the sky above me. This was the ship. The lines of her bows were stretched wide as the wings of a bird, and the armour of her plating gleamed and throbbed like diamonds.

The ceremony opened with prayer and the responses were sung by a choir.

I stood away from the people close to the railing that separated me from the ship and looked down upon the dockyard below, which was packed with thousands of enthusiastic people. "Eternal Father, strong to save" was sung with vigour and supplication; every docker, bluejacket, marine, parson, and Admiral singing with all their hearts against the clean sea wind.

After the blessing had been said, the constructor came bustling up to me, and pointing to four little ropes said:

"Come on! Be quick! Don't you see she's straining? Look at the dial!" He pushed a hammer and chisel into my hands.

Oblivious of his meaning and completely flustered I snatched the hammer begging him to let me hold the chisel by myself, but he insisted upon helping me, at which I missed the mark and brought the hammer down upon my own wrist and the constructor's: he instantly let go, and, recovering myself, I raised my hand above my head and said in a slow, loud voice:

"I name you Collingwood. God bless you, and all who sail in you," and with a violent blow severed the four ropes that released the galleys and the ship slid splashlessly into the sea.

Every head was strained, and every arm raised to bless her as she struck the water, and we ended the ceremony by singing "Rule Britannia!" with moist eyes to the massed bands.

While the company buzzed about, I watched the bluejackets below me stuffing small bits of rope into their pockets for luck. A slip of paper was sent up to the Admiral from the yard saying that all the people had heard me, and at the evening party Devonport men told me they had never before heard the name of a battleship at a launch. I said I should indeed have felt inadequate had I muttered as if I had been in front of a mouse-trap.

November, 1908

On Sunday (November the 8th) the McKennas, Henry and I went to morning service on the first-class cruiser Leviathan. We sat about 200 of us under a long, low roof below the upper deck. I looked at the faces of the bluejackets ; jolly, indifferent, keen men of every type : plain and handsome, tall and short, and thought if they had been women how they would have stared about at the Prime Minister, possibly even at Pamela and myself ; but men are uncurious and occupied ; they are not whispering, inquisitive busybodies. People may say what they like, but men and women are not what the Suffrage ladies think ; they are of a different kind and not a variation of the same species.

I asked Admiral Fawkes, with whom we lunched, if he or any of his sea friends were afraid of the German Fleet. He said he thought the Navy that was copied and did not copy was likely to remain the most powerful, but that the sea scare had done the Service harm, as it kept young men in the home waters when they should have been gaining experience abroad. He added that they knew all about the German Fleet except her target practice at sea.

When I went to bed exhausted and thoughtful, I wondered upon what mission my beautiful Collingwood would first sail.

CHAPTER VI

The Budget. The Veto of the House of Lords. Death of King Edward VII

10 Downing Street, 1908

Our political differences over the House of Lords came to a head in 1909, the year before King Edward died.

They had started in 1908 when after a private meeting in Lansdowne House the Lords rejected the Licensing Bill. For a Democracy to endow two Chambers with equal powers although one represents an elected public and the other the Peers, is, as the Chinese would say, "distinguishable from true wisdom."

No one who valued the moral, mental or physical energies of the people in this country could have watched with indifference the paralysing effect that drink and tied houses had upon the public. Except for rare crimes of fraud, our prisons were full of men detained for crimes of violence; and the drink problem, though hampered by teetotallers, became a Crusade.

My husband had taken every care over his Bill, and it needs courage for a Liberal to attack privileges which affect the working man more than the leisured classes. The Unionists, who have always been in sympathy with "the Trade," counted on the popularity of their cry to cover the clumsiness of their conduct; but in the years of which I am writing there was a public conscience stronger than there is to-day, and from the moment the Licensing Bill was rejected the powers of the Peers became a question of first-rate importance.

Whatever our Party passed in the House of Commons which was controversial was rejected by the Peers; and it had become a settled policy that every measure a Unionist Government could devise had an easy passage through the Lords. We were being governed by a single Chamber. One danger of allowing this state of things was that, while striking a blow at the Constitution, it must ultimately have succeeded in making the Crown unpopular.

There was no choice before my husband if he were to strengthen the Commons or safeguard the King; but when he undertook to alter the relationship of the two Houses few of his colleagues thought he could succeed. Neither changing our Prison System, providing Old Age Pensions, scotching Protection, or giving the South Africans self-government was as difficult as removing the veto of the House of Lords.

10 Downing Street, 1909

The opportunity came in 1909 over the Finance Bill.

The famous Budget of that year was largely the creation of Sir Robert Chalmers, a clever man and a friend of ours. Its somewhat oriental method of asking for more than it intended to take did not appeal to me. But nothing we did was comparable to the classical behaviour of the Upper Opposition. The Dukes' speeches gave us an unfair advantage, backed as they were by the lesser lights—Earls, Marquises and Barons.

It was hardly to be believed that men who could read and write would have written or spoken in the manner they did. One noble Marquis wrote that if the Budget were passed he would be compelled to reduce his annual subscription to the London Hospital from five pounds to three a year; and in the same paper it was announced that he had bought a yacht "rumoured to cost £1,000 a month."

Another noble Earl, speaking in a different vein, said: "If we Peers are obliged to, we will do our duty;

10 Downing Street 1909

and from what we hear in the country we have nothing to fear."

I never understood anything about Finance, but gathered from the discussions which took place over the Budget that it was an ingenious, complicated, perfectly sound measure, with a touch of "art nouvel" and an inquisitorial flavour, which was deeply resented.

. . . . .

On the 4th of November, 1909, we drove down to the House of Commons to hear the final debate upon the Budget, and found it crowded from the ceiling to the floor.

Henry and Arthur Balfour wound up, and the Division was taken at midnight.

When the figures were announced that our majority (independent of the Irish) was 230, the uproarious cheering and counter-cheering betrayed the mixture of hate and enthusiasm with which the Bill was regarded.

The remarkable thing about the passing of this Budget was the unanimity with which people of different views backed it. Even the men who act according to their humour, which in party politics may make you fancy yourself a leader, but seldom gets you followers—voted for the Bill.

Non-party men do not succeed in this country because we are a political race and understand the rules of the game. Cabinet government is a corporate conscience, and concerted action is more valuable than individual opinion. Men subordinate their opinions on small matters for the sake of larger issues, and only part from one another when those issues are at stake. It is more from vanity than reflection that men of a certain sort always vote against their own Party ; and in my judgment the non-party politician is well named when he is called "a moderate man." The alternative to the Party

System is Coalition, which ends by being all things to all men and scrapping principles for promotion. To sell your faith for your advancement can never succeed, and Politics conducted by Coalition must ultimately lead to disaster. 10 Downing Street, 1909

The House adjourned for nineteen days after a dinner given by the Chancellor of the Exchequer to celebrate the passing of the Budget, which my husband attended. On his return he gave me the following card, with which every guest had been presented:

SOUVENIR OF THE BUDGET.

Dinner given by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, November 5th, 1909.

April 29th—November 4th, 1909.
70 Parliamentary Days.
554 Divisions.

Second Reading (June 10th)	For -	366	
	Against	209	157
Third Reading (November 4th)	For -	379	
	Against	149	230

	Divisions.
Rt. Hon. H. H. Asquith - - - -	202
Rt. Hon. S. C. Buxton - - - -	328
Rt. Hon. W. Churchill - - - -	198
Mr. A. Dewar - - - - - -	296
Sir S. T. Evans - - - - - -	505
Rt. Hon. R. B. Haldane - - - -	215
Rt. Hon. C. E. H. Hobhouse - - -	440
Rt. Hon. D. Lloyd George - - -	462
Mr. C. F. G. Masterman - - - -	420
Sir H. Norman - - - - -	279
Rt. Hon. J. A. Pease - - - -	518
Sir. W. S. Robson - - - - -	434
Rt. Hon. H. Samuel - - - -	296

10 Downing Street, 1909

I received a letter from Sir Edward Grey the following day, which ended with :

"It seems incredible that the Budget should be over in the House of Commons ; one had come to believe unconsciously that the Session would never finish, and it is a surprise to find that the end is in sight. I haven't an idea what will follow or be the result of the Elections. I am no optimist : X— has made too much running, I fear, to carry the electors with us : in this country they move slowly and distrust rhetoric.

"Yours sincerely,

"EDWARD GREY.

"*November 5th*, 1909.

"Fallodon."

I made a real and lasting friendship with Sir Edward Grey and will quote from my diary what I wrote of him in the earlier part of this year.

From my Diary, 1909

"Sir Edward Grey is a very complete person and part and parcel of a golden mixture of character and judgment. He has shown me deep sympathy over Charty's terrible illness. He understands more than most people both the agony and the inevitability of Death.

"When I told him that I was going to Paris to see my dear friend, Aline Sassoon, the moment I heard that she was dying he wrote me this letter :

"'ITCHEN ABBAS,

"'ALRESFORD,

"'*July 17th*, 1909.

"'DEAR MRS. ASQUITH,

"'I can really say nothing in answer to your letter. There is a suffering which purifies, raises and strengthens and in which one can see the Crown as well as the Cross, but where there is no Crown visible

[Harris Agency

Photo]

VISCOUNT GREY OF FALLODON

From my Diary, 1909

it is terrible even to see suffering and must be intolerable to undergo it. My own belief is that if we could know all we should understand everything, but there is much in the world that cannot be explained without knowing what came before life and what is to come after it, and of that we know nothing, for faith is not knowledge. All that we can do is to take refuge in reverence and submission. "God is in Heaven and thou upon earth, therefore let thy words be few" is one way of expressing the reverence, and: "I was dumb and opened not my mouth for it was Thy doing" is an expression of submission. They are hard things to say, but I don't know what else is to be said, and it is better to say them than to rail against what we cannot understand, or to attempt to belittle it, and put a gloss upon it. That is all I can say to you of what you have been through: and what could be said to Lady Sassoon is beyond me. The abyss is unfathomable to those who stand upon the brink, and I fear each of us who has to descend into it must find for himself or herself on what ledges a foot can be placed: and the path by which one can find his way is not always that which is practicable for another. I have been through that which would make it very easy for me to die, but that path is no use for anyone who has to die and wants to live.

"'Yours sincerely,

"'EDWARD GREY.'"

. . . . . .

November, 1909

On the 15th of November, 1909, we went to stay at Windsor Castle, and, upon our arrival, Henry had a long interview with the King. When he came back I asked him if they had talked about politics, and he said:

"Yes; we discussed freely the folly of the peers. I

From my Diary, 1909

told him that Queen Elizabeth had sometimes refused to sign her assent to Bills, but that this has not been done since her reign, and had become obsolete for 200 years. He is much vexed with the Lords, and said to me: 'Not a line of any sort have I received as to their intentions, and I know no more than the man in the street what they are doing!'"

"Surely it is not at all nice of them!" I said; to which Henry replied:

"Oh! they aren't bound to tell the King what they are doing. H.M. thinks party politics have never been more bitter, but I told him I was not so sure of that; I thought they were bitterer in the days of Home Rule."

I asked him if the King had agreed about this, and he replied:

"Perhaps he did, I am not sure; he is not at all argumentative, and understands everything that is properly put to him. He is a clever man and a good listener, if you aren't too long. He has an excellent head and is most observant about people; he said some surprisingly shrewd things to me about Lansdowne and Balfour. The situation really distresses him and he told Knollys to-day he thought the Peers were mad."

The Lord Chamberlain* at that moment interrupted us to tell Henry that the King wished Ministers to wear white breeches at the Investiture of the Garter for the King of Portugal, which was to take place on the following day.

Henry said: "I think I am quite safe, my dear Bobby, in my Trinity House dress."

To which Mr. Spencer, looking a little nettled, replied: "No one must dictate to the Prime Minister, of course!"

He went on to tell us how nice the King had been over the Budget, and added:

"It has not always been so: we Liberals, my dear Prime Minister, have often suffered over politics at Court.

* The late Earl Spencer.

From my Diary, 1909

I had a long talk with Fitzmaurice* yesterday, who was most frank about his brother and the Peers."

After this the Lord Chamberlain left us and we hurried to our rooms to prepare for dinner, as everyone was as punctual at Windsor Castle then as they are to-day.

I wore a silver dress with a cornflower-blue chiffon sash and Henry put on his Trinity House uniform. He had become an Elder Brother the year before, when King George, then Prince of Wales, had written the following letter:

"FROGMORE HOUSE,
WINDSOR.
"*Nov. 17th*, 1908.

"MY DEAR MR. ASQUITH,

"It would give me, as Master of Trinity House, great pleasure if you would allow me to appoint you an Honorary brother of that ancient Corporation, a position which has been held by so many of your distinguished predecessors in the office of Prime Minister. Mr. Gladstone, Lord Salisbury, Lord Rosebery, Mr. Balfour and Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman have all been associated with the Trinity House.

"I know that your acceptance of this proposal would give the keenest satisfaction to all the members of the Corporation. Perhaps if this is agreeable to you, you could spare an hour to come and be sworn in some time in the month of February.

"Believe me, dear Mr. Asquith,
"Very sincerely yours,
GEORGE P."

I had a short conversation with the King after dinner, and was struck by the clearness and strength of his opinions and wondered if half the House of Lords had any knowledge of them.

* Lord Edmund Fitzmaurice, brother of the Marquis of Lansdowne.

From my Diary, November, 1909

The next day we opened the papers and read that Lord Lansdowne had given notice in the House of Lords that, on the motion for the second reading of the Finance Bill, he would move :

> " That this House is not justified in giving its consent to this Bill until it has been submitted to the judgment of the country."

This was a declaration of war which made the General Election in January of the following year, inevitable.

. . . . . .

We left Windsor immediately after breakfast, and, in spite of the tremendous feeling over the Peers and the Budget, felt that everyone had shown us the greatest courtesy at the Castle. The Queen, dazzlingly beautiful, whether in gold and silver at night, or in violet velvet by day, succeeded in making every woman look common beside her.

When we returned to London, political feeling was running high, and incredibly foolish things were said in fashionable society ; but I can never remember the time when wise things were said in Mayfair, and the only topic of discussion was the possible action that the King might take over the Budget.

The Unionists were in a difficult position, as most of their supporters, including the Brewers and Tariff Reformers, were strongly in favour of Rejection.

I wrote in my diary on the 18th of November, 1909 :

From my Diary, November, 18th, 1909

" Acceptance of the Budget would look like weakness, but in the end it would be better for them to give way : the Lords would hear no more of their veto, the Bill might get less popular, and, between now and the time for dissolution, we may make ourselves more disliked. If the Lords reject the Budget I will back us to get in at the next Election, although by a smaller majority.

End of Diary quotation

AWFUL SCENE OF GLOOM AND DEJECTION, WHEN THE MINISTRY HEARD OF THE LORDS' DECISION TO REFER THE BUDGET TO THE COUNTRY

[*Reproduced by kind permission of 'Punch'*

PARLIAMENTARY GOSSIP.

CHARWOMAN OF HOUSE OF LORDS. "YOUR PEOPLE GONE AWAY FOR A BIT O' QUIET THINKING?"
CHARWOMAN OF HOUSE OF COMMONS. "WELL, O' COURSE, I DON'T *KNOW* NOTHINK, BUT YOU MARK MY WORDS, THERE 'S HINFLUENCES A-GOIN' ON. 'OWEVER, MUM 'S THE WORD, GOD BLESS 'IM."

Reproduced by kind permission of "Punch."

(I cut this cartoon out of *Punch* which in those days was a Liberal paper.)

The assembly of the House of Lords to discuss the rejection of the Budget was the largest ever known. Aged Peers came from remote regions of the country-side who could not even find their way to the Houses of Parliament. The galleries were packed with all the great ladies of England, and the debate extended over ten days.

The best speeches made were by those who, while hating the Bill, realized that its rejection would raise a bigger question than that of the Budget. Lord Rosebery, Lord Cromer, Lord Balfour of Burleigh, and the Archbishop of York appealed in words of great eloquence to their fellow-peers not to raise this question. But the Lords acted as if demented. What blindness could have fallen upon Lord Lansdowne and others to urge the Peers down these slippery slopes to the sea will always remain a mystery. It is said that the Whips had promised an immense majority in the country over Tariff Reform. But even if they had won that election their doom could only be a question of time, for it was evident that in future no Liberal Government could take Office without guarantees for the destruction of the Veto.

Obdurate to all these considerations, and influenced by the speeches of Lord Milner and Lord Willoughby de Broke, the Lords by an overwhelming majority on the 30th of November rejected the Budget, and on the following Saturday an immense multitude filled Trafalgar Square to demonstrate not so much in the interests of the Budget as against the action of the Lords.

The position which Henry had foreseen had come to pass, and he instantly asked for and obtained sanction for the dissolution of Parliament.

The controversy which raged up and down the country between the Peers and the People was an issue which could have but one result.

The Lords had committed suicide.

The last weeks of the year 1909 we spent in touring all over the country making speeches, and after an unsatisfactory but predictable General Election we were returned in January, 1910, by a reduced majority. The general public showed an enlightened interest in the question of Protection, which, considering the ignorance on all financial matters of the majority of people, surprised us. We received many and amusing letters; among the best is the following from Lord Hugh Cecil:

"HATFIELD HOUSE,
"*February 18th*, 1910.

"DEAR MRS. ASQUITH,

"Lloyd George has got you into a nice mess: nothing left for you but to try and create 500 peers and perish miserably attacking the King. That's what comes of making an irresponsible demagogue Chancellor of the Exchequer.

"Yours ever,
"HUGH CECIL."

When we returned to Downing Street, successful and defeated candidates poured in to give us their experiences of the elections. Among others I saw Mr. John Burns,* an old and valued friend of ours, whose career, if he would write it, would be among the great and interesting autobiographies of the world.

Among other adventures he served a short sentence in prison for a riot in Trafalgar Square and was defended in the Law Courts by my husband before he became Home Secretary. In protesting against the long hours of the railway men when he was standing in the witness box he said:

"You should always give a man an opportunity of telling his wife he is still her sweetheart."

* The Right Hon. John Burns.

Mr. John Burns started life as a riveter on the railway line, and ultimately became a Cabinet Minister. Among other excellent things he said to me once when we were motoring together to spend a week-end with my sister Lucy at Easton Grey:

"X—— knows nothing of nature. Nor indeed very much about anything!" Pointing to the reddening sky he added: "He would neither observe nor admire a sunset like that! and if you mentioned Cimabue he would only think you were talking of a new kind of asphalt."

In discussing the General Election with me that afternoon he criticized the violence of some of the speeches, and said:

"Before a man in the position of Chancellor of the Exchequer talks of 'the first of the litter' he should make quite sure that it is going to be drowned."

I did not meet any of the Conservatives whose opinions were worth recording till a few days later, when Mr. Chamberlain asked me to go and see him in his house at Prince's Gate.

Although I had not met him since his health had broken down we had always remained friends.

Mr. Chamberlain was essentially loyal—neither mean nor sly—and saw with great clearness a very short distance. He thoroughly understood the view that the average elector was likely to hold, and predicted from the beginning the antipathy there would be to Chinese Labour in this country.

Like many successful organisers he was an interesting man with an uninteresting mind. His intelligence was superior to his intellect, and his sense of drama, love of action, and lack of moods, freed him from complications, which made him an easy man to deal with. Affectionate and faithful to his friends, he was a bad enemy. Though never a knight in the arena, he was too great an artist to be described as a bruiser. He started his political career as an advanced Radical and became the hero of the Tory Party.

History repeats itself in strange ways, and I continue to wonder why the Conservatives, who are so easily tamed, should be as leaderless to-day as they were then.

I was welcomed on my arrival by the lovely Mrs. Chamberlain and found her husband sitting erect in his arm-chair near the tea table; his hair was black and brushed, and he had an orchid in his tightly buttoned frock coat.

The room we were shown into was furnished in early Pullman-car or late North-German-Lloyd style and struck me as singularly undistinguished.

My host's speech was indistinct but his mind was alert. After greeting him with a deep inside pity and much affection, I asked him if he had been pleased with the results of the General Election. I added that I myself had been disappointed with the South, but that the North had gone well for us; to which he answered that he had expected to beat us, and wondered why Scotland was always so Liberal. I amused him by saying that we were an uninfluenceable race with an advanced middle class, superior to the aristocracy and too clever to be taken in by Tariff Reform, and added:

"You know, Mr. Chamberlain, I would not much care to be a Unionist to-day!"

Mistaking my tone for one of triumph, he said:

"But you also have great difficulties ahead of you."

I explained that I meant that the Protectionist party could not feel any satisfaction at being led by Arthur Balfour, as he had never been one of them. To which he replied:

"He is coming on a little, but the truth is he never understood anything at all about the question."

Continuing upon our Cabinet, he said of one of them, pointing to his heart:

"He is a vulgar man in the worst sense of the word and will disappear; give him enough rope and he will hang himself; I admire nothing in a man like that.

Winston is the cleverest of all the young men, and the mistake Arthur made was letting him go."

I indicated that, however true this might be, he was hated by his old party ; to which he replied :

" They would welcome him to-day with open arms if he were to return to them."

We ended our talk by his telling me that he had always been a Home Ruler, and that nothing could be done till the difficulties in Ireland were settled.

Wanting to show some of the compassion I felt for him, I told him before leaving that I also had had a nervous break-down, and added :

" You know, Mr. Chamberlain, I was *so* ill that I thought I was *done* " : to which he answered :

" Better to *think* it, Mrs. Asquith, than to *know* it as I do."

I never saw him again.

. . . . . .

Mr. Chamberlain was right ; our party had great difficulties ahead of them ; and I began to realize of how little value brains can be ; I was tired of cleverness and thanked God that Henry had more than this. In the great moments of life ; in times of love, or of birth, or of death, brains count for nothing. The clever among Henry's colleagues were not always loyal, and the loyal, with notable exceptions, were not too clever.

I will quote what I wrote in my diary, April, 1910 :

From my Diary, 10 Downing Street April, 1910

" I sit in No. 10 and wonder how long we shall stay here. Our Lords Resolutions will be over on the 14th, and on the 28th of April we take the third reading. For the moment we do not know how the Irish will vote, but if they join the Tories against us we shall resign.

" Henry wants a complete change of scene. He dines with Lloyd George on the 28th, at the Savoy, to celebrate the passing of the Budget, and motors to

Portsmouth after dinner with the McKennas, who take him on the Admiralty Yacht to inspect our fortifications at Gibraltar. He had to say good-bye to the King, and, fearing he might not get back before dinner, left me the following letter : From my Diary, 10 Downing Street, April, 1910

"'DOWNING STREET,

"'*April 28th*, 1910.

"'As you know I am dining with Lloyd George to-night, at the Savoy, to celebrate the Budget and go on after dinner with the McKennas to Portsmouth. If I can, I will look in on the chance of seeing you. Send all letters through the Admiralty. I am glad to get away but sorry to leave you. All through these trying weeks you have been more than anyone sympathetic, understanding, loyal and loving. I have felt it much.

"'I had a good talk with the King this evening and found him most reasonable.

"'Ever your own.'

"Left alone in Downing Street, I dined with the Charles Hamiltons on the 5th of May. I saw no posters in the streets on my return to Downing Street, but was told afterwards that the news of King Edward's illness had been advertised in the Strand and Piccadilly.

"Frances Horner telephoned to me early on the morning of the 6th, and asked me if I was anxious, as she feared the King was seriously ill. I seized the *Times* and read the bulletin of the King's bronchitis signed by the Drs. Powell and Reid. Realising that this was grave, I dressed quickly and hurried round to the Palace. I read in silence the latest bulletin hanging on the wall, while several of my friends were signing the King's book : From my Diary, 10 Downing Street, May 6th, 1910

"'No progress : condition causes grave anxiety.'

"I felt full of apprehension, and wondered if the Admiralty Yacht would be in reach of news. I found

From my Diary, 10 Downing Street, May 6th, 1910

Charlie Hardinge* on my return to Downing Street, who told me he had left Lord Knollys in tears and suggested my sending Henry a telegram: I sat down and wrote:

"'Advise your returning immediately. The King seriously ill: all London in state of well-founded alarm: Margot.'

"This was sent from the Admiralty in cypher. I felt shattered, and received my lunch party with a silent heart.

"Lord Kitchener, Lady Frances Balfour, John Burns, Nathalie Ridley, Lucy, Elizabeth and I sat down to lunch. K. of K. walked up to the window and broke the silence by saying the flag was still flying at the Palace, a remark which jarred upon me profoundly; but excepting Frances Balfour none of the company seemed at all able to realize the gravity of the situation.

"While we were eating our lunch, messages came from the Palace:

"'No improvement.'

"I sent a note to Lord Knollys begging him to send for Kingston Fowler, as Court Doctors are not always the best. He answered with his unfailing courtesy:

"'Many thanks for your letter, I will at once tell the Doctors what you say. I am afraid I can give you no better news.'

"Our Secretary, Roderick Meiklejohn, came in after lunch and reassured me by saying he was certain the Admiralty Yacht would be in reach of the news of the King's illness, and while he was talking I received the following note from John Burns:

"'*May 6th*, 1910.

"'*Private.*

"'DEAR MRS. ASQUITH,

"'I hear and I hope it is true that you have sent

* Lord Hardinge of Penshurst.

to the Prime Minister to come home. The Admiralty will code it on to Spain at once.

" ' News serious and confirms your view of to-day.

" ' Yours sincerely,

" ' JOHN BURNS.'

From my Diary, 10 Downing Street, May 6th, 1910

" In the afternoon I went to see Anne Poynder* ; she told me that her husband had had an audience of the King upon his appointment as Governor to New Zealand the day before ; and that, although H.M. had been up and dressed, he looked alarmingly ill. On his return he had said to her :

" ' I don't know what other people feel, but *I* think I have been with a dying man to-day ! '

" All London is standing still with anxiety and I can hardly refrain from crying.

" That night saying my prayers with Elizabeth and Puffin we prayed out loud that God might save the King.

" At 10.30 p.m. after dining alone with the Islingtons I went round to see the Hardinges. Edward Grey came into the room with Sir Charles and I noticed they both looked white with sorrow. We did not shake hands : I asked for the latest news. One of them answered :

" ' It is practically over ; he is unconscious. He sent for Sir Ernest Cassel this morning and insisted on sitting up in his clothes although breathless and unable to speak ; his courage is amazing.'

" None of us spoke.

" Sir Edward Grey drove me away from the Hardinges and said when we were alone in the taxi :

" ' This is a very big moment ; these things have to be, but it has come as a terrible shock in its suddenness.'

* Lady Islington.

From my Diary, 10 Downing Street, May 6th, 1910

"He dropped me at Anne Islington's, where my motor was waiting for me. Our footman had copied the latest bulletin stuck up for the crowd to see outside the Palace and gave it to me as I got into the car. It said:

"'The King's symptoms have become worse to-day and His Majesty's condition is now serious.'

"I motored Anne to Buckingham Palace on my way home at 11 p.m., and there we found large silent groups of people reading this same bulletin. On my return to 10 Downing Street I went to bed.

"The head messenger,* followed by his wife in her nightgown, came down to see me, and standing in the doorway of my bedroom asked for the latest news; I said it was practically all over, and they left the room shutting the door noiselessly behind them.

"I lay awake with the lights turned on, sleepless, stunned, and cold.

"At midnight there was a knock at my door. Mr. Lindsay walked in, and, stopping at the foot of the bed, said:

"'His Majesty passed away at 11.45.'

"'So the King is dead!!' I said out loud and burst into tears.

"I slept from 2 till 5 a.m. and then wrote my diary. I sent letters to the Queen and Lord Knollys.

"After the Privy Council the next morning Sir Ernest Cassel came to see me and we cried together on the sofa.

"I dined that night at Mrs. George West's, and met Winston Churchill, the Crewes and the Harcourts. At the end of dinner Winston said:

"'Let us drink to the health of the new King'.

"To which Lord Crewe answered:

"'Rather to the memory of the old.'

. . . . . .

* Mr. Lindsay.

From my Diary, May, 1910

" Henry* returned from his cruise on the 9th of May, 1910, and on the 10th he paid his first visit to the new King. He came away deeply moved by his modesty and common sense.

" On the 11th we went to the House of Commons to hear Henry and Arthur Balfour move their messages of condolence to the Court.

" Having just come away from an audience with our beautiful Queen—who had taken him in to see her dead King—Henry's voice trembled so much when he was speaking that I thought he would break down. In the course of his speech, he said :

" ' He loved his people at home and over the seas. Their interests were his interests, and their fame was his fame. He had no self apart from them.

" ' I will not touch for more than a moment on more delicate and sacred ground ; on his personal charm, the warmth and wealth of his humanity, his unfailing considerateness for all who were permitted to work for him. I will only say in this connection that no man in our time has been more justly beloved by his family and his friends, and no ruler in our or in any time has been more sincerely true, more unswervingly loyal, more uniformly kind to his advisers and his servants.'

" On the 20th of May, 1910, I dressed at 6.30 a.m., and walked into the streets to see the crowd. It was the day of the funeral and people from all parts of the globe were thronging the town. I had sent the children the night before to Lady Lewis' house in Portland Place, as the

* He wrote the following account for my diary on his return : " The ' Enchantress ' after visiting Lisbon was making her way from Cadiz to Gibraltar when we received a wireless message that the King was ill. This was confirmed when we reached Gibraltar, and I directed that we should at once return home, though there was nothing in the message that seemed to call for immediate alarm. We started at once, and about three in the morning of the 7th of May, 1910, I was awakened with the news that a wireless had just arrived announcing the King's death. I went up on deck, in the twilight before dawn, and my gaze was arrested by the sight of Halley's Comet blazing in the sky. It was the first and last time that any of us saw it."

From my Diary, 20th May, 1910

police had warned me it would be easier for them to go from thence to Lady Wernher's, from whose balcony they were to see the Procession. Henry and I breakfasted alone, and at 9 a.m. we walked to Westminster Hall to see the coffin start and the cortège collect for Paddington station.

"We walked slowly down the middle of the soldiered street under a grilling sun, and joined the small official group which consisted of the Speaker, John Burns, Lord Carrington and the Crewes. We stood upon a red carpet outside Westminster Hall awaiting the arrival of the nine Kings who had come from various parts of Europe for the funeral. As most people wanted to see the procession from a balcony, and some were motoring or going by train to Windsor, Peggy Crewe and I were the only women among the officials.

"We all stood in silence and watched the forming up of the Procession.

"The gun-carriage led, followed by the charger with the military boots reversed; then came the King's kilted loader leading his wire-haired terrier* by a strap.

"Crewe and I patted the little dog, who was most friendly—but the beautiful charger, which I had approached with confidence, stretched out his fine neck and showed me all his teeth.

"At 10 a.m. the Kings clattered into the quadrangle followed by two coaches. The Queen, Princess Victoria and the Wales children were in one and Queen Alexandra and the King sat alone in the other. They were closely followed by the Kaiser and the Duke of Connaught, who were mounted upon horseback. They all pulled up a few yards from where we were standing and the Kaiser opened the carriage door with conscious promptness for Queen Alexandra, who stepped out, a vision of beauty, dressed entirely in crêpe with a long black veil floating

* Cæsar.

From my Diary, 20th May, 1910

away behind her. We curtsied to the ground with bowed heads as she passed us. The Archbishop of Canterbury received the King and his mother in the open doorway and they followed him back into Westminster Hall. The only others who went with them were the Kaiser and the Duke of Connaught.

"We were told that the horsemanship of the seven Kings might, if they dismounted, lead to complications, so they remained seated while we made a study of their faces. These were not impressive. I liked the Crown Prince of Austria's the least, and the King of Spain's the best; but the Kaiser's cut features, observant eyes and immobile carriage, as he swung a short leg across a grey hunter, made him the most interesting figure of them all.

"I could not help thinking what a terrifying result a bomb thrown from Big Ben would have had upon that assemblage, and blessed this country for its freedom.

"The Kings, the soldiers, and the retinue held the salute like bronzes when the coffin came out upon the shoulders of Guardsmen and was placed upon the gun-carriage; and continued holding it while the white pall, Union Jack, the Crown and the Insignia were placed upon the bier. The Earl Marshal*, heavily decked in gold, sat uneasily upon his horse and the procession moved slowly away.

"We crawled to the station in the motor and found Paddington like the Ascot enclosure. It was closely packed with famous and dazzling people, their uniforms glittering with decorations, and all the fashionable ladies veiled and in black. We travelled down to Windsor in the same carriage as the Crewes, Edward Grey and John Morley.

"On arriving at the Cloisters we looked at the flowers piled up in stacks to the roof. With the curiosity that makes most of us try and pick out our own faces in a photographic group I tried to find the wreath we had sent.

* The late Duke of Norfolk.

From my Diary, May 20th, 1910

It was large and made of sweet briar with a bunch of eglantine roses at the stem, but I never saw it. I do not suppose that there were ever collected in one place so many lovely flowers, or with such moving inscriptions written upon them as we saw that day.

"When we went into the Chapel I was interested to see how many times the pew-openers would change their victims' places. The Opposition, the Queen's Pages, the Knights of the Garter, and their foreign equivalents were ruthlessly shoved about, while every new pew-opener of greater prestige than the last rolled and unrolled his list till the seating became a mosaic of indecision and confusion. Luckily, Henry, as the King's chief male, and the Duchess of Buccleuch as his chief female servant, occupied the best seats in the choir, and I was placed next to him.

"Gazing opposite at the Corps Diplomatique I caught a friendly recognition from Countess Benckendorff,* but the long musicless wait had a stupefying effect, and what with short nights and an excess of emotion I fell into a deep, short and unobserved sleep.

"I was awakened by the music of the massed bands playing Chopin's Funeral March in the street. The choir came up the aisle followed by the Bishops and Archbishop, and stood upon the altar steps.

"The King walking with Queen Alexandra followed the coffin closely. At some distance behind them came the Dowager Czarina, the Duke of Connaught and the Kaiser; and these were followed by the other seven Kings. A prie-dieu was placed behind the Coffin for the Queen, and when she took her place in front of it the King and the others all fell back and she was left standing erect and alone.

"When the Coffin was lowered, and slowly disappearing into the ground she knelt suddenly down and covered her face with both her hands.

"That single mourning figure, kneeling under the

* The wife of our late Russian Ambassador.

faded banners and coloured light, will always remain among the beautiful memories of my life."

End of Diary quotation

. . . . . .

10 Downing Street, November, 1910

With the accession to the Throne of King George—whom my husband and I had known and loved since boyhood—the Constitutional question dealing with the House of Lords became much more difficult. Rather than embarrass the new King, my husband decided to refer the subject to a round-table Conference, over which he held high hopes ; but after six months of deliberation the negotiations broke down ; and on the 10th of November, I received a telegram while I was staying with the children in Scotland, in which he wrote :

" Tout est fini."

It was clear to me that there was nothing for it but for us to have another General Election and as quickly as possible before the discontent of our party could become vocal. I sent our Chief Whip—the Master of Elibank—a telegram to this effect, and another to Henry, who had gone to Sandringham to see the King.

The patience and resolution that the Prime Minister had shown over the Budget had made an impression upon the country, and as the Unionists had no programme I felt no fears as to the result of the Elections. Our opponents were fiercely divided over several questions, and neither lauding the peers nor taxing food was likely to attract the public.

Knowing what my husband would feel at the breakdown of the Conference, I started for London in the evening of the day I received his telegram.

The Cabinet drew up a State Paper of first-rate importance, and on the 15th of November, 1910, Henry took it to Buckingham Palace. He spent two hours with Lord Knollys explaining its various points before he had his audience with the King.

10 Downing Street, 15th November, 1910

On his return to Downing Street I asked him which of his colleagues had contributed most to this Document. Had Winston ?

" No," he answered, " all Winston's suggestions were discounted."

" What about X——? " I said.

Henry answered it was not his " genre " as he was useless upon paper. Lord Crewe had been wise ; John Morley had made valuable verbal alterations ; but Grey and he had contributed the bulk. He ended by saying :

" If the King refuses to exercise his prerogative, I resign at once and explain the reasons for my resignation by reading this paper in the House of Commons. If we are beaten at the General Election the question will never arise, and if we get in by a working majority the Lords will give way, sc the King won't be involved."

I asked him if he thought we should get in ; to which he answered :

" Yes, I think we shall, though the future has a nasty way of turning up surprises."

Lady Frances Balfour said to me that she had written to her brother-in-law, Arthur, and told him she had travelled all over the country, and that unless he could controvert dear food we should be returned by an overwhelming majority.

. . . . . .

November 17th, 1910

On the 17th of November Henry went to see the King and at seven o'clock of the same evening he walked into my bedroom.

After a pause he sat down and told me that Lord Crewe and he had had a remarkable talk with His Majesty : that they had found him without obstinacy, both plucky and reasonable. He read him the State Paper, and pointed out the impossibility of allowing affairs to drift on as they were doing. He said that, after six months of Conference and doing all that lay in his power to find a solution of this difficult problem, no one could ever accuse him of

undue haste. His Majesty listened attentively to him and ultimately agreed. November 17th, 1910

The audience was over.

Putting an end to the rival powers of the two Houses of Parliament was a political act of supreme courage, but my husband is as convinced to-day as he was then that it was the only way in which he could safeguard both the Commons or the King.

In telling me of this interview he was deeply moved and ended a memorable conversation by saying:

"You can only make changes in this country Constitutionally: any other method leads to Revolution."

Lord Knollys told us that when Henry had left the Palace the King had said to him:

"Is this the advice that you would have given my father?"

He replied:

"Yes, Sir; and your father would have taken it."

. . . . . .

Between the 17th of November and the 20th of December, 1910, the General Election was over and we were returned by a majority of 124 (one seat to the good).

It was a purely personal Election and could not have been won without my husband. I must also add that our Chief Whip had organised the country from top to toe.

Alec Murray—better known as the Master of Elibank—was a rare combination of grit and honey, with a perfect understanding of men and their motives. Having a sunny temper—never taciturn, sudden or contentious—he could "get into touch" to use his favourite expression with Liberal, Labour or Tory with equal ease. Although at times rusé, he was trustworthy, and Lord FitzAlan told me that, during all the time they were rival whips of the Unionist and Liberal Parties in the House, they had worked together in perfect loyalty.

November 17th, 1910

I loved the Master and have never known anyone at all like him. He was a mixture of slim and simple that no country but my own could have produced, with a devotion to schemes and persons only equalled by an Italian servant of the 15th century.

When I am disgusted by lack of heart, candour or character in the people I meet, I do not want to see them ; but the Master had no such recoil ; I feel it a waste of time being in mean company, but no one wasted the Master's time ; he was plump and laughed, and, though an indefatigable worker, was ready to see anyone at any time and in any place. He found a fish in every net, caught some and let others go, and his thinking powers were entirely concentrated upon people. I never knew what his political convictions were but he devoted the best part of his life to Liberalism. He had a real affection for Mr. Lloyd George, and did his utmost to make him work loyally with my husband. His flair for stage-management amounted to genius and he was familiar with every form of advertisement.

Working daily with a man like Henry, whose modesty amounts to deformity, and whose independence of character baffles the prophets and irritates the Press, our Chief Whip's ingenuity and resource were invaluable to us in 10 Downing Street, and when he left us we did not find his successor. His pleasure in this world, as well as his duty, was concerned in making men live harmoniously together, and Lord Murray of Elibank should have a high place in the next, if the Almighty keeps His promise to the Peace-makers.

December 21st, 1910

After the final figures of the Elections were known he came to see my husband. He told us that the Unionists, being wrong in their calculations, were raising an outcry over the results of the Election, giving every reason but the right one to account for our success.

He ended his talk by saying :

" I met Acland Hood, who is suffering from all the

abuse and recrimination of a defeated Party ; he said to me : ' Our people want to know how it was we didn't win. I told them frankly that, wherever I went all over the country, I heard the same thing ; no one fancied the Lords or dear food.' " December 21st, 1910

. . .

Suspicions and divisions in the ranks of our Opponents obscured our difficulties, but nevertheless they were accumulating.

The Parliament Bill went forward from February till July, but, in spite of large majorities in the House of Commons, the Lords reduced it to impotence.

On the 21st of July, 1911, my husband informed the Press that the House of Commons would not accept the Lords' amendments and the King had agreed to exercise his Prerogative of creating sufficient Peers to enable the Bill to pass into law.

This declaration caused an uproar.

Conscious of their follies and smarting under their defeat the more short-sighted of the rank and fashion determined to have their revenge.

I will here quote from my diary :

" On Monday, the 24th of July, 1911, we drove in an open motor to the House of Commons and were cheered through the streets. From my Diary, July, 1911

" The Speaker's Gallery was closely packed, and excited ladies were standing up on their chairs. My husband got a deafening reception as he walked up the floor of the House ; but I saw in a moment that the Opposition was furious and between the counter-cheers I could hear an occasional shout of ' Traitor ! '

" When the hubbub had subsided he rose to move the rejection of the Lords' amendments ; at this Lord Hugh Cecil and Mr. F. E. Smith* led an organised and con-

* Lord Birkenhead.

From my Diary, July, 1911

tinuous uproar which kept him on his feet for over thirty minutes.

" ' Divide ! Divide ! 'Vide ! 'Vide ! ! ! ' was shouted by the Opposition in an orgy of stupidity and ruffianism every time he opened his mouth. The Speaker tried in vain to make them listen, but the House was out of hand and the uproar continued.

" Looking at the frenzied faces from above, I realised slowly that Henry was being howled down. Edward Grey got up from his place four off from where my husband was standing, and sat down again close beside him. His face was set.

" I scrawled a hasty line from our stifling gallery and sent it down to him, ' They will listen to you—so for God's sake defend him from the cats and the cads ! '

" Arthur Balfour followed, and when Grey rose to speak the stillness was formidable.

" Always the most distinguished figure in the House, he stood for a moment white and silent, and looked at the enemy :

" ' If arguments are not to be listened to from the Prime Minister there is not one of us who will attempt to take his place,' he said, and sat down in an echo of cheers.

" Mr. F. E. Smith rose to reply, but the Liberals would not listen to him and the Speaker adjourned the House on the ground of grave disorder.

" I met Edward Grey for a moment afterwards alone, and, when I pressed my lips to his hand, his eyes filled with tears.

" Sir Alfred Cripps* and Colonel Lockwood,† with the fine feeling that has often differentiated them from the rest of their Party, called a private meeting to draft a letter of apology to the Prime Minister for what had taken place. Among many letters, I received the following from my dear friend, Lord Henry Bentinck :

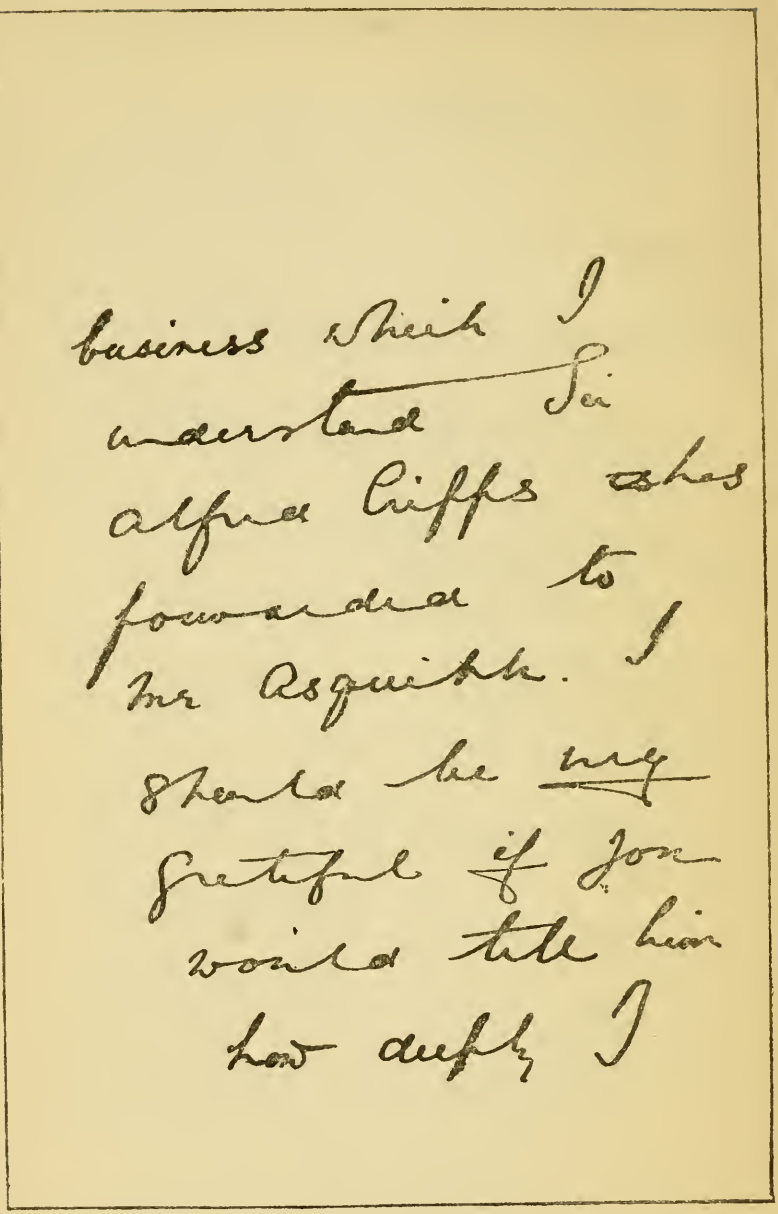
* Lord Parmoor.
† Lord Lambourne.

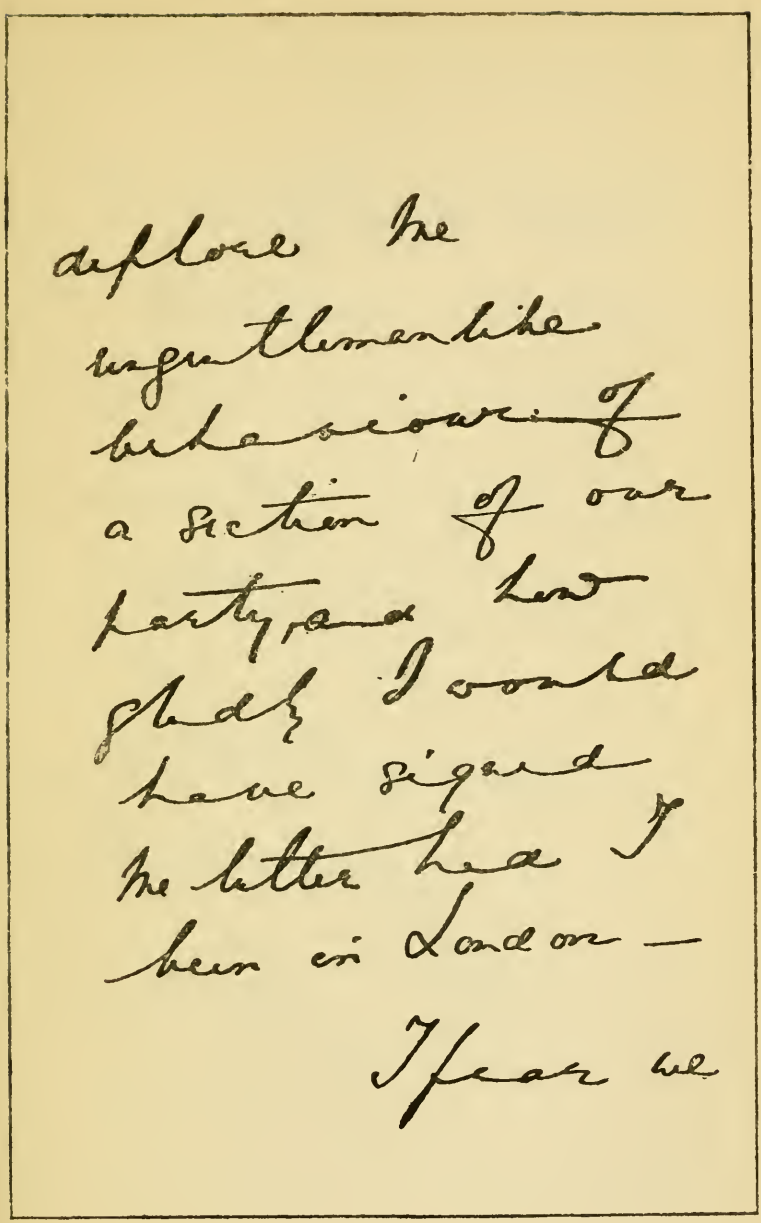
53 Grosvenor Street.

July 25

Dearest Margot:

I have been
away from London
& have only just
returned, consequently
have had no
opportunity of signing
the letter of regret
for the Rookeries
business on

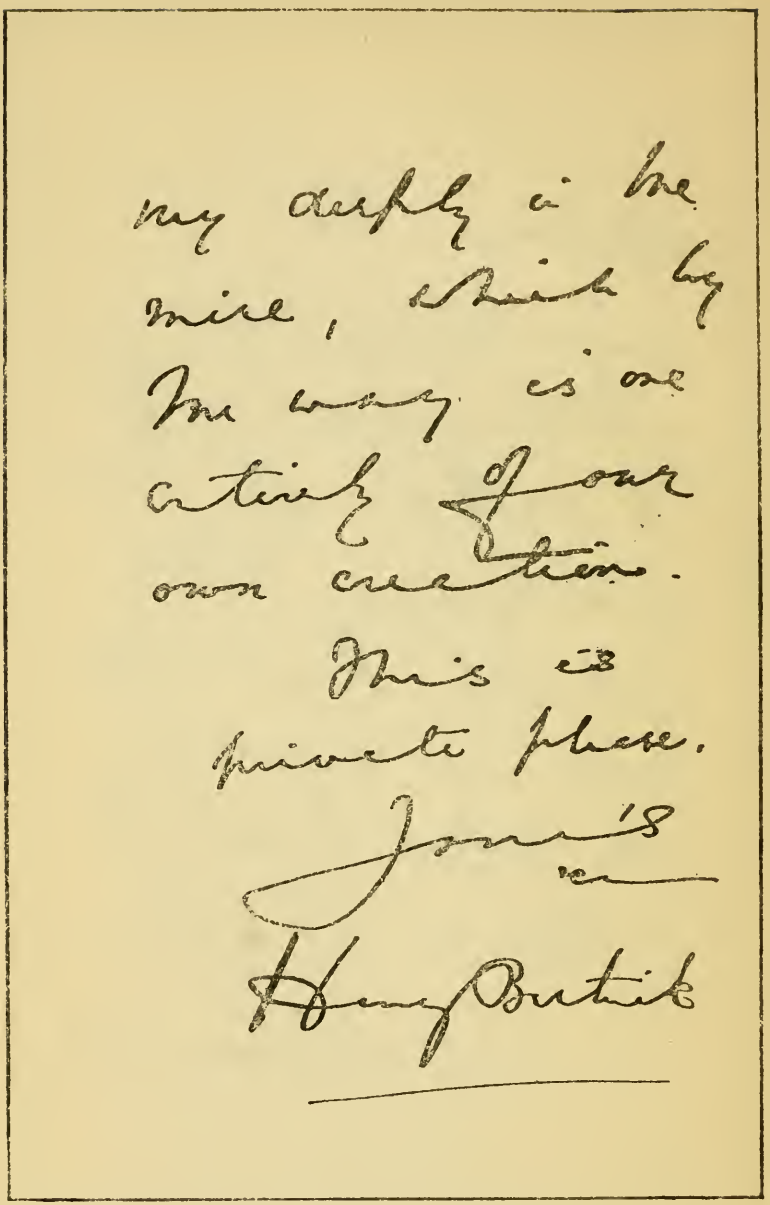

business which I
understand Sir
Alfred Cliffe has
forwarded to
Mr Asquith. I
should be very
grateful if you
would take him
how deeply I



my deeply in the
mire, which by
the way is one
entirely of our
own creation.

This is
private phase.

Jones
Henry Bertrick



From my Diary, July, 1911

"On the 25th of July, the *Times* and other papers published the full text of the speech that my husband had been prevented from making in the House the day before.

"After giving a complete history of the Veto Bill and the principle upon which it was founded, and which had been approved by the House of Commons in 1907, and endorsed at two subsequent General Elections, he ended by saying:

"'We have, therefore, come to the conclusion—and thought it courteous and right to communicate that conclusion in advance to leaders of the Opposition—that, unless the House of Commons is prepared to concede these essential points, there is only one constitutional way of escape from what would otherwise be a deadlock. It is the method of resort to the Prerogative which is recognised by the most authoritative exponents of Constitutional law and practice, when, as here the case, the House of Commons must be presumed to represent on the matter in dispute the deliberate decision of the nation.'

"He wound up with:

"'I need hardly add that we do not desire to see the prerogative exercised. There is nothing humiliating to a great party in admitting defeat. No one asks them to accept that defeat as final. They have only to convince their fellow-countrymen that they are right and we are wrong, and they can repeal our Bill.'

"For a fortnight the excitement continued and the Tories moved a vote of censure on the Government. Ashamed of their action of two weeks before, they listened to my husband in silence. In this vindication of the action he had taken throughout the controversy and the manner in which he had kept the King's name out of the dispute, Henry made one of the most moving appeals ever addressed to the Commons. It was a speech which will live in history, and, as he built up his case in

From my Diary

orderly sequence, the ranks of the Conservatives looked shattered and broken. Even the *Times* had to admit that ' Dexterity was a special characteristic of the speech : as it has been of his conduct throughout the whole controversy.'

" He ended :

" ' I am accustomed, as Lord Grey was accustomed, to be accused of breach of the Constitution, and even of treachery to the Crown. I confess that I am not in the least sensitive to this cheap and ill-informed form of vituperation. It has been my privilege, now I think unique, to serve, in close and confidential relations, three successive British Sovereigns. My conscience tells me that in that capacity, many and great as have been my failings and shortcomings, I have consistently striven to uphold the dignity and just privileges of the Crown. *But I hold my office, not only by favour of the Crown, but by the confidence of the whole people. And I should be guilty indeed of treason if, in this supreme moment of a great struggle, I were to betray their trust.*'

" When he sat down the whole Liberal Party rose and applauded him, and it seemed as if the cheers would never cease "

End of Diary quotation

The end is soon told. The Bill reached the House of Lords in a state of confusion. There were Die-hards and other Peers who were fighting each other ; friend attacked friend, and the issue remained uncertain until the last moment. Some of Lord Murray's possible Peers watched from the gallery, hoping for rejection, the Archbishop of Canterbury was cursed and blessed, as he moved from group to group, persuading and pleading with each to abstain.

Amid passionate excitement the Bill was finally passed by a majority of 17. Most of the Peers abstained from voting.

Thus was accomplished the greatest Constitutional Reform since 1688, a success due to the patience, ability and foresight of one man, and that—the Prime Minister

CHAPTER VII

War

10 Downing Street, July, 1914

It is not my purpose to write a history of the war; or of any of the campaign, either in its successes or failures. These have been fully dealt with by most of the great Generals and many competent amateurs. But from my diaries and notes taken often on the same day I shall give a true and simple account of what I saw and heard from August the 4th, 1914, until we left Downing Street in December, 1916.

. . . .

The London season of 1914 had been a disappointing one for me, and not an amusing one for Elizabeth, and as I was anxious that she should have a little fun I sent her alone on the 25th of July to stay with Mrs. George Keppel, who had taken a house in Holland.

Alice Keppel is a woman of almost historical interest, not only from her friendship with King Edward, but from her happy personality, and her knowledge of society and of the men of the day. She is a plucky woman of fashion; human, adventurous, and gay, who in spite of doing what she liked all her life, has never made an enemy. Her native wit and wits cover a certain lack of culture, but her desire to please has never diminished her sincerity.

When we had to leave Downing Street without a roof over our heads in 1916—as our house in Cavendish Square was let to Lady Cunard—she put her own bedroom and sitting-room at my disposal and insisted upon living on an upper storey herself.

To be a Liberal in high society is rare: indeed I often

wonder in what society they are to be found. I do not meet them among golfers, soldiers, sailors, or servants; nor have I seen much Liberalism in the Church, the Court, or the City; but Alice Keppel was born in Scotland and has remained a true Liberal. 10 Downing Street July, 1914

King Edward asked me once if I had ever known a woman of kinder or sweeter nature than hers, and I could truthfully answer that I had not.

When Elizabeth went to Holland on the 25th Foreign affairs were not causing uneasiness to any of the people that I had seen. But a feeling of apprehension made me telegraph to her a few days after her departure to tell her to return She arrived on the 1st of August accompanied by Lord Castlerosse and other young men who had been summoned to join their regiments. She told me she would never have been allowed to travel had she not dined early and in a serge dress, and that no one in Holland felt the slightest anxiety over the European situation.

Some weeks after she had been with me, I received the following letter from Alice Keppel, which I have kept and shall always value.

> "Margot dearest—you must get stronger; the time is coming when we shall all have to keep a stiff upper lip. Your heart is too large; you feel other people's sorrows as much as your own, but the grit you have always had is ever there. I think you are right when you say that there has been a lack of *feeling in the last few years. What struck me was the want of real gaiety about everything; but 'au fond' I feel the British people are as sensible and straight-thinking as they ever were, and believe we shall come out of this better and stronger. Elizabeth's visit has been a real joy; she is a delightful child,

* I had mentioned in my letter of thanks to her the cruelties of the Suffragettes, and the indifference shown over the drowning of a friend of ours at a supper party on the Thames; also a general lack of reverence among the young intellectuals that had been growing up in England.

10 Downing Street, July, 1914

only 17! with such a quick bright brain and a heart of gold. We all—including servants—loved her, and her wish to help in every way in the house I found charming. When the war news grew black all she said was '*I must* go back, or Mother will row over for me! You have a darling girl, Margot, clever—and better than that—loving, unselfish and good.

"Your always affec.

"ALICE K."

The apprehension I felt was shared by no one in London society, and as late as the 29th, when the Archbishop of Canterbury and Lord D'Abernon were lunching in Downing Street, they were amazed when I told them I had stopped my sister Lucy going to paint in France, and had telegraphed for Elizabeth to return from Holland.

What had frightened me was that, on Monday the 27th, Sir Edward Grey announced in the House that he had made a proposal to Germany, France, and Italy, to hold a Conference with Great Britain, but that, although France and Italy had accepted, no reply* had been received from Germany.

The strain of waiting for foreign telegrams with the fear of war haunting my brain had taken away all my vitality, and on Wednesday the 29th I went to rest before dinner earlier than usual; but I could not sleep. I lay awake listening to the hooting of horns, screams of trains, the cries of street traffic, as if they had been muffled drums heard through thick muslin.

At 7.30 p.m. the door opened and Henry came into my bedroom. I saw at once by the gravity of his face that something had happened: he generally walks up and down when talking, but he stood quite still.

I sat up and we looked at each other.

"I have sent the precautionary telegram to every

* This is a complete answer to the Kaiser's contention that Germany did not want war.

part of the Empire," he said ; " informing all the Government Offices—Naval, Military, Trade and Foreign—that they must prepare for war. We have been considering this for the last two years at the Committee of Defence, and it has never been done before ; for over an hour and a half we worked, and the last telegram was sent off at 3.30 this afternoon. We have arranged to see the representatives of the Press daily, so as to tell them what they may, and what they may not publish."

Deeply moved, and thrilled with excitement, I observed the emotion in his face and said :

" Has it come to this ! " At which he nodded without speaking, and after kissing me left the room.

Thursday, July 30th, 1914.

The next day I went to the Speaker's Gallery, full of apprehension.

The House of Commons seemed unfamiliar ; yet how well I knew it ! The smiling policeman and rapid lift ; the courteous servants, noiseless doors ; and the ugly, pretty, stupid, clever, West End ladies' faces. The suppressed chatter, dingy air, frugal teas, and cheerless light of the Speaker's gallery—all these I knew and loved, but they seemed changed for me that afternoon.

The position of affairs following on the Austrian note to Servia had developed with alarming rapidity. Mr. Bonar Law and Sir Edward Carson had seen my husband in the morning, and they had parted in complete agreement over the gravity of the situation.

It was impossible for Henry to move his Irish Amending Bill, which had been awaited with passionate excitement and was to have taken place that day.

I went to the Prime Minister's room on my arrival at the House, but, seeing Dillon and Redmond waiting outside his door, I remained in the passage.

Before going into the Gallery, Henry and I met for a moment alone, and I asked him if things were really so alarming. To which he replied :

" Yes, I'm afraid they are : our fellows don't all

Thursday, July 30th, 1914

agree with me about the situation, but times are too serious for any personal consideration and whether X—— or Z—— do or do not resign matters little to me, as long as Crewe and Grey are there: I don't intend to be caught napping."

I remember vaguely the frigid acknowledgments of some of the Ulster aristocracy and a withdrawal of skirts as I took my seat in the closely packed Gallery and watched my husband with throbbing pulses as he rose to his feet.

"I do not propose to make the motion which stands in my name," he said, "but by the indulgence of the House I should like to give the reason. We meet to-day under conditions of gravity which are almost unparalleled in the experience of every one of us. The issues of peace and war are hanging in the balance, and with them the risk of a catastrophe of which it is impossible to measure either the dimensions or the effects. In these circumstances it is of vital importance in the interests of the whole world that this country, which has no interest of its own directly at stake, should present a united front, and be able to speak and act with the authority of an undivided nation. If we were to proceed to-day with the first Order on the paper, we should inevitably, unless the Debate was conducted in an artificial tone, be involved in acute controversy in regard to domestic differences whose importance to ourselves no one in any quarter of the House is disposed to disparage. I need not say more than that such a use of our time at such a moment might have injurious effects on the international situation. I have had the advantage of consultation with the Leader of the Opposition, who, I know, shares to the full the view which I have expressed. We therefore propose to put off for the present the consideration of the Second Reading of the Amending Bill—of course without prejudice to its future—in the hope that, by a postponement of the discussion, the patriotism of all parties will

contribute what lies in our power, if not to avert, at least to circumscribe the calamities which threaten the world."

Thursday July 30th, 1914

When he sat down there was a look of bewilderment amounting to awe upon every member's face. I got up to go, but the fashionable females crowded round me, pressing close and asking questions.

"Good Heavens! Margot!" they said, "what can this mean? Don't you realise the Irish will be fighting each other this very night? How fearfully dangerous! What does it mean?"

The Orange aristocracy, who had been engaged in strenuous preparations for their civil war and had neither bowed nor spoken to me for months past, joined in the questioning. Looking at them without listening and answering as if in a dream, I said:

"We are on the verge of a European War."

. . . . .

10 Downing Street, Friday, July 31st, 1914

The next day, Friday the 31st, while I was breakfasting in bed, my husband came to see me. Having heard in a general way that things were going a little better, I looked anxiously at his face; but he said that he himself had given up all hope, and left the room.

After a long Cabinet he lunched at the Admiralty, and went to Buckingham Palace, where he remained for over an hour with the King.

He arrived late at the House, having been kept by an interview with business men in the city.

"They are the greatest ninnies I have ever had to tackle," he said, "I found them all in a state of funk, like old women chattering over tea cups in a Cathedral town."

He left me and hurried into the House to make the following statement:

"We have heard, not from St. Petersburg, but from Germany, that Russia has proclaimed a general mobilisation of her army and her fleet; and that, in consequence

10 Downing Street, Friday, July 31st, 1914

of this, martial law was to be proclaimed for Germany. We understand this to mean that mobilisation will follow in Germany, if the Russian mobilisation is general and is proceeded with. In these circumstances I should prefer not to answer any questions until Monday."

I could see that, in spite of Henry's marvellously calm temper and even spirits, he was deeply anxious.

There are certain sorts of men who in times of crisis wonder what they themselves can get out of the situation; and could I but write frankly of the conduct of, not only one or two of the Colleagues, but of other men in the early days of the war, it would be interesting, in view of the stories current at the time, and the nonsense that has been invented since. But the sorrows of those early days, and the tragic events which led up to the war are too fresh in my heart for me to chronicle gossip.

Conversation at dinner in Downing Street that night was difficult, and whatever topic was started was immediately dropped. When we had finished, Henry went down to the Cabinet room and Sir Edward Grey joined us in the drawing-room. We sat and talked in a disjointed way, all sitting in a circle.

I watched Grey's handsome face and felt the healing freshness of his simple and convinced personality. He is a man who "thinks to scale," as Lord Moulton once said to me of Rufus Reading, and obliges one to reconstruct the meaning of the word Genius.

In the middle of our languid talk, messengers came in with piles of Foreign Office boxes and he jumped up and left the room.

Mr. Montagu (Financial Secretary to the Treasury) came in, and, after exchanging a few words, he seized me by the arm and said in a violent whisper:

"We ought to mobilize to-morrow and declare it! I wish X—— and Z—— could be crushed for ever! their influence is most pernicious: would you believe it, they are all against any form of action!"

"How about McKenna?" I asked; to which he replied:

10 Downing Street, Friday, July 31st, 1914

"Oh! he's all right, and in perfect agreement with the Prime Minister. X—— is mad not to see that we must mobilize at once!"

"Don't fret!" I said calmly, "neither X—— nor Z—— will have the smallest influence over Henry; his mind has been made up from the first and no one will be able to change it now."

10 Downing Street, Saturday, August 1st, 1914

On Saturday the 1st we read in the papers that Germany had declared war upon Russia.

The Benckendorffs* dined with us that night and we had a lively altercation. He said that it was not the Kaiser but his War Party that had prompted the Germans to make this move. I disagreed, as I could not but think that the Kaiser, being the big figure in Germany, was unlikely to be influenced by his son or by any person or Party. I added impulsively that I was glad that we could act together as a nation independent of every other country, which was not very tactful, but I could not help thinking how much I would have disliked any alliance with a country as misgoverned as Russia, and remembered in that connection the saying that "Britons never, *never* will be Slavs!"

We were still worried over the Irish question, and after dinner I wrote a line to Mr. Redmond telling him that he had the opportunity of his life of setting an unforgettable example to the Carsonites if he would go to the House of Commons on the Monday and in a great speech offer all his soldiers to the Government; or, if he preferred it, write and offer then to the King. It appeared to me that it would be a dramatic thing to do at such a moment, and might strengthen the claim of Ireland upon the gratitude of the British people.

On Sunday morning, August the 2nd, he replied to me in the following letter:

* Count Benckendorff the late Russian Ambassador.

18, WYNNSTAY GARDENS,
KENSINGTON.

Dear Mrs Asquith
I received your letter late
last night. I am very
grateful to you for it.
I hope to see the Prime
Minister tomorrow before
the House meets if only for
a few moments & I hope I
may be able to follow your
advice. With sincere sympathy
I am very truly yrs
A. Redmond

Sunday
2 Aug
1914

10 Downing Street Sunday, August 2nd, 1914

After reading this I went with Elizabeth to the Communion Service at St. Paul's. It was a relief to see children sitting as usual on the steps playing with the strutting pigeons, and as I walked out of the baking sunlight into the cool Cathedral my mind felt at rest.

I dropped Elizabeth at 10 Downing Street on my return and went across the Horse Guards to Carlton House Terrace to ask if I could see the Lichnowskys.*

It was the habit of the Germans to choose men of honour for their Ambassadors in London, and to appoint as first secretaries men versed in political intrigue capable of keeping the Kaiser informed of every facet of our domestic policy.

Prince Lichnowsky followed the footsteps of his predecessor, Count Metternich, and was a sincere and honest man. He had a pointed head, a peevish voice, and bad manners with servants He combined in his personal appearance a look of race and a Goya picture. His wife was a handsome woman of talents and character, who from perversity, lack of vanity, and love of caprice, had allowed her figure to get fat ; a condition that always prejudices me. But in Princess Lichnowsky I found so much nature, affection and enterprise that, in spite of black socks, white boots and crazy tiaras, I could not but admire her. She detested the influence of the Prussian Court ; and the Kaiser—to whom her husband had always been loyal—was a forbidden subject between them.

When the Prince first arrived in London, he told me that, on the occasion of his appointment as British Ambassador, he had said to the Kaiser that if he intended making trouble in England he had got hold of the wrong man. On hearing this, I asked if he thought there was much feeling against us in Germany ; at which he assured me with perfect sincerity that the relations between the two countries were excellent ; that there was a great deal of exaggeration in the talk, and that he himself had

* The German Ambassador.

10 Downing Street, Sunday, August 2nd, 1914

never observed any ill-feeling, but added with an innocent smile :

" Our Kaiser is a man of impulse."

That Sunday morning I found Princess Lichnowsky lying on a green sofa with a Dachshund by her side ; her eyes starved and swollen from crying, and her husband, walking up and down the room, was wringing his hands. On seeing me he caught me by the arm and said in a hoarse, high voice :

" Oh ! say there is surely not going to be war ! " (he pronounced war as if it rhymed with far). " Dear Mrs. Asquith, can *nothing* be done to prevent it ! "

I sat down on the sofa and putting my arms round Mechtilde Lichnowsky we burst into tears. She got up and pointing out of the window to the sky and green trees said with impulse :

" To think that we should bring such sorrow on innocent happy people ! Have I not always loathed the Kaiser and his brutes of friends ! One thousand times I have said the same, and I will never cross his threshold again."

Prince Lichnowsky sat down beside us in great agitation :

" But I do not understand what has happened ! What is it all about ? " he asked.

To which I replied :

" I can only imagine the evil genius of your Kaiser . . ." at this the Prince interrupted me :

" He is ill-informed—impulsive, and must be *mad !* he never listens, or believes one word of what I say ; he answers none of my telegrams."

I told him that Count Metternich had been treated in precisely the same manner ; Mechtilde Lichnowsky adding with bitterness :

" Ah ! that brutal hard war-party of ours makes men fiends ! "

I remained for a few moments doing what I could

to console them but felt powerless, and when I said good-bye to the Ambassador tears were running down his cheeks.

10 Downing Street, Sunday, August 2nd, 1914

Mr. Montagu dined with us that night. Though gloomy and depressed he was less excited than he had been on the previous Friday.

"Till last night," he said, "I had hoped against hope that we might have been able to keep out of this war, but my hopes have vanished. All the men I've seen feel like me except X——, who is intriguing with that scoundrel Z——. I asked the Attorney General yesterday what was going to be said upon specie in the House to-morrow, and he answered:

"Don't worry! none of us can say at this moment what resignations the Prime Minister may or may not have in his hands at to-morrow's Cabinet."

Feeling profoundly indignant I thought of saying:

"All right! You can warn these men that nothing will affect my husband; he will form a Coalition with the other side and then they will be done for"; but, as there was no one whose judgment I particularly valued on the Opposition benches, I refrained, and contented myself by asking if he really thought X—— and Z—— would resign at the next day's Cabinet. We were interrupted by O—— coming into the room, and, not having seen him for some days, and, knowing that he knew the inner workings of X——'s mind, I asked him if it was really true that X—— was intriguing with the Pacifists, to which O—— replied:

"He has always loathed militarism, as you know, since the days of the Boer War, and has an inferior crowd round him, but, until he knows how much backing he will have in the country, I doubt if he will commit himself."

Monday August 3rd, 1914

After what Mr. Montagu and others had told me I felt full of anxiety when I woke up on the Monday morning and, thinking over the two Ministers most likely to resign, I wondered what line Henry would take in the Cabinet.

It is always interesting to speculate on the motives

Monday, August 3rd, 1914

that move men, and after considerable experience I have come to the conclusion that self-love or self-consciousness of some kind lies at the root of most resignations. At every stage in life men are to be found on the point of resigning. They start in the nursery, and continue in the servants' hall. We are all familiar with such phrases as:

" Oh ! very well then, I shan't play ! " or :

" In that case, ma'am, I had perhaps better go."

Unself-centred people do not suffer from the same temptations : they are simple and disengaged, willing to help and ready to combine or stand aside. Threatening to resign is a mild form of blackmail equally common to both sexes.

We had men of every temperament and every persuasion in our Government : orators, windbags, funks and fighters, Jews, Celts and non-Conformists. I have never understood why anyone should be proud of having either Jewish or Celtic blood in their veins. I have had, and still have, devoted friends among the Jews, but have often been painfully reminded of the saying, " A Jew is round your neck, at your feet, but never by your side " ; Celtic blood is usually accompanied by excited brains and a reckless temperament, and is always an excuse for exaggeration. When not whining or wheedling, the Celt is usually in a state of bluff or funk, and can always wind himself up to the kind of rhetoric that no housemaid can resist.

Nor can I say that the non-Conformist Conscience has never disappointed me. At one tine it was the backbone of this country, nobly presented as it was in old days by the *Manchester Guardian* ; but the Government policy in Ireland of an Eye for an Eye, or two teeth for one, dignified by the name of " Official Reprisals," stirred little indignation in the breasts of the non-Conformists or their Press; and the men I know who claim to have it to-day are maidenly, mulish and misled.

There has been much inaccuracy and misrepresentation

about our Party entering into the war, nor may I tell the whole truth about it, but there are a few general observations which I can make here as appropriately as in any other part of this volume. Monday, August 3rd, 1914

The Liberal Party has always hated Force, and love of Peace is what their opponents most dislike in them.

It is not easy for any Prime Minister to commit his Party to a war on foreign soil with an unknown foe, but it was lucky for this country that the Liberals were in power in 1914, as men might have been suspicious of acquiescing in such a terrible decision at the dictation of a Jingo Government.

War being, as John Hay said, "The most Futile and Ferocious of all human follies," no one can be blamed for hesitating to enter into it. But as so much rhetorical rubbish has been spoken, and so much political capital been made out of the winning of the Great War it is only fair that people should know the truth; and if, after the publication of General Sir Frederick Maurice's pamphlet, there are people who still believe that one man won the war I shall be surprised.* I can only say that despite the wavering of some of the most important of my husband's Liberal colleagues neither Lord Grey, Mr Herbert Samuel, Mr. Runciman, Mr. McKenna nor Lord Crewe showed the smallest hesitation, and my husband made up his mind from the first that we were bound in honour to fight. His faith was as great as the fears of a few of his colleagues were shallow, and his heart was fixed.

In Proverbs xxix, verse 18, it says: "Where there is no vision the people perish," and I have sometimes wondered what would have happened if Henry had not sent the Precautionary telegrams as early as the 29th of July, 1914, and followed them by speeches which inspired the whole British Empire.

What was the position of our Army in the year 1914?

* Documentary proof of how nearly the Great War was lost under the direction of Mr. Lloyd George can be found in a pamphlet issued by the *Westminster Gazette*, "Intrigues of the War," by General Sir Frederick Maurice.

Monday, August 3rd, 1914

Thanks to Lord Haldane, Mr. Balfour, Sir Maurice Hankey and my husband we had an Expeditionary Force not large enough to fight half Europe—because no Minister would remain in power for a week who attempted to keep an army for such event—but more perfectly trained and equipped than any body of men that ever left our shores. And they could have been backed by an ever larger army had the Territorials been made use of, but Lord Kitchener did not care for other men's schemes and had not been long enough in this country to know what had been happening. He was a lovable man of great ability, but he had a moderate understanding.

A good deal that is dull and inaccurate has been published about him, but, whether from too much or too little admiration, the Kitchener that I knew has not been truly presented to the world.

In spite of a striking appearance his frank desert eye was misleading. A fine figure of commanding height, added to an address both autocratic and abrupt, conveyed to strangers the not altogether true impression that Lord Kitchener was a man of high moral courage and inexorable will. Be this as it may, no one who dominated the public mind and captured the private services of as many good men in the manner he did could be other than remarkable ; and, apart from being a recruiting agent of incalculable value, whose steadfast stare was seen on every hoarding, Lord Kitchener was a man of genius.

When he was appointed to the War Office in 1914, I was one of the few people who regretted it. I had known him from girlhood, and, while recognising his charm, was aware of his limitations. In spite of warnings from my husband and Mr. McKenna—who was then Home Secretary, —he undertook at the outbreak of war more than one man could easily accomplish, and he had neither the temperament nor training for team work.

His life had been largely spent among coloured races who, when not overpowered, were generally outwitted by

19th August
1914

WAR, OFFICE,
WHITEHALL,
S.W.

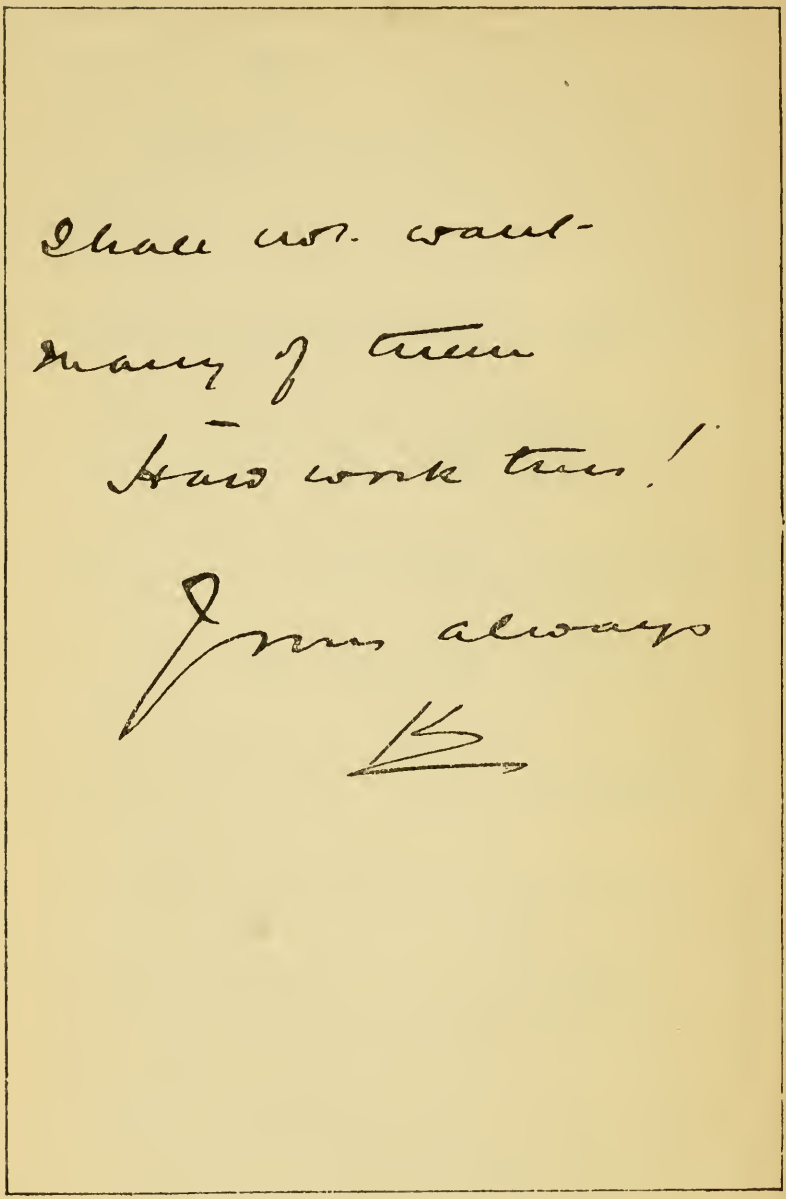
Dear Mrs Asquith

I will look into what has been done about Surgeons I know Sir W Cheyne & will consult him

I hope all will go well & that we

I shall not want
many of them
Hard work this!

Yours always
B



him, and being a natural diplomatist he was inclined to suspect his fellow-men. Monday, August 3rd, 1914

With the exception of my husband, for whom he had an affection amounting to reverence, Lord Kitchener could not get on with his colleagues, but the myth cannot be sustained that he would have been more successful had he worked with a stronger Cabinet.

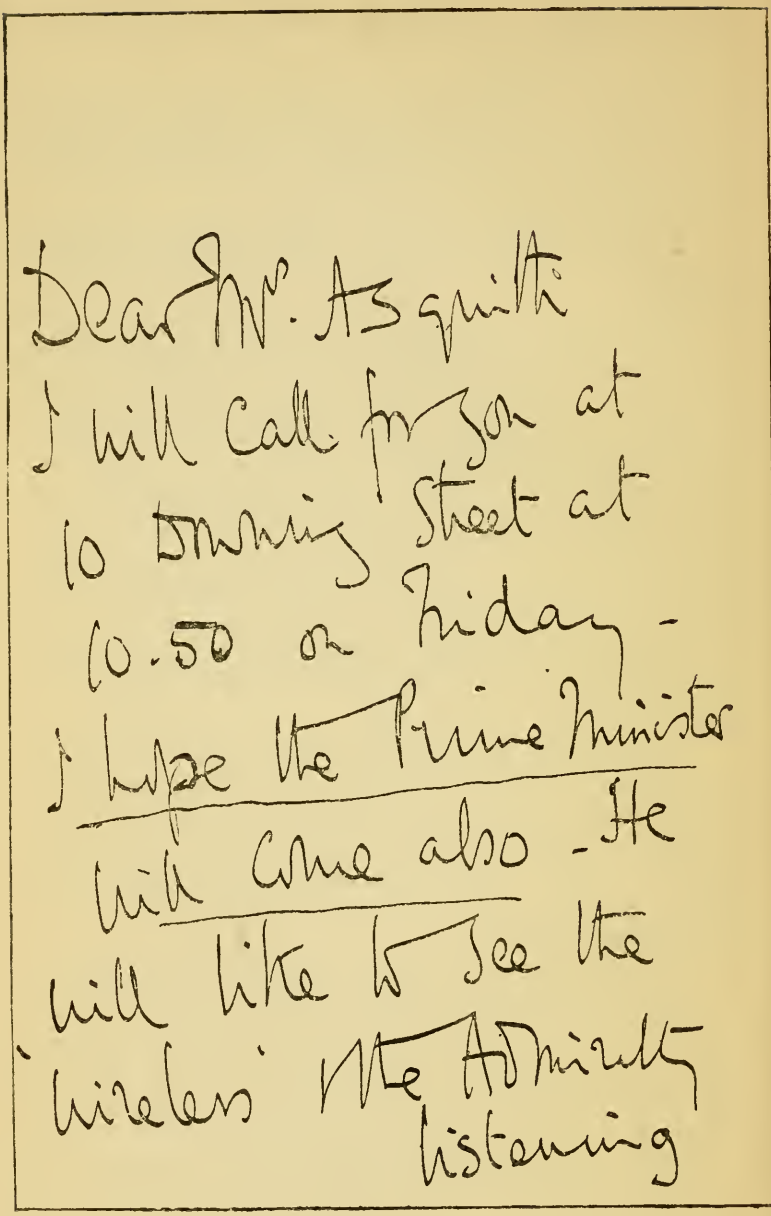
Who were the men he had to work with in the Great War? They are all alive, well known, and puzzle nobody.

Is Sir Edward Carson a man of evasive personality who ever shirked conflict? Is Mr. Balfour's mind muddled, or Mr. McKenna's mystical? Has Mr. Churchill a horror of big undertakings? and does Sir William Robertson lack resolution? Could anyone accuse Sir Edward Grey of vacillating conviction? or the late Lord Fisher of want of courage? Did Mr. Bonar Law fear the future? or the present Prime Minister intrigue against the High Command? Surely not: the truth is that the awe he inspired in the East he was unable to impress upon a Western Cabinet, and the real tragedy of Lord Kitchener was that none of his colleagues were afraid of him.

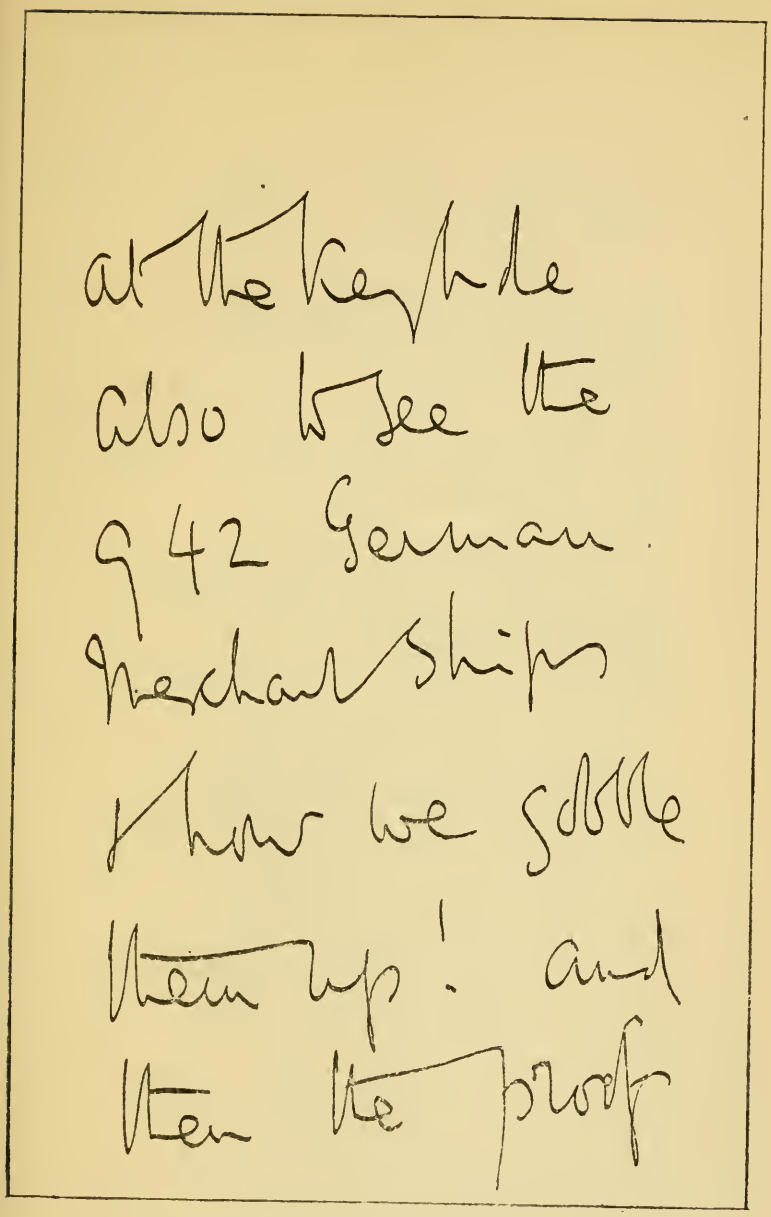
He belonged to an earlier generation, before self-determination had come into fashion, and being accustomed to subject races would never have recognised the legitimate desire for independence either in Ireland, Egypt or India, and he opened his career with two incalculable blunders: he ignored the Territorial Force, and muddled the Irish.

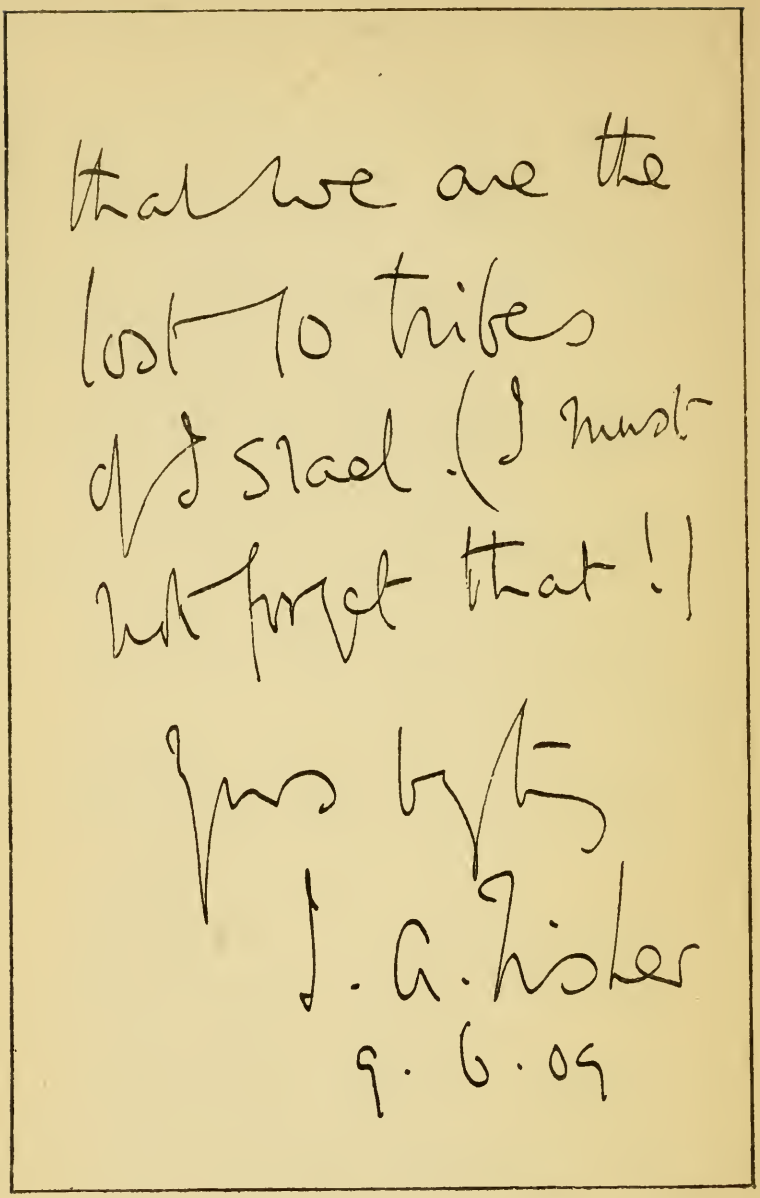
Great Britain has always held the theory that Freedom is the heritage of man and not to be granted or withheld according to his might, but this has never been put into practice in Ireland; we have doled out in unequal measure a special brand of Freedom for that country which has earned us its lasting suspicion.

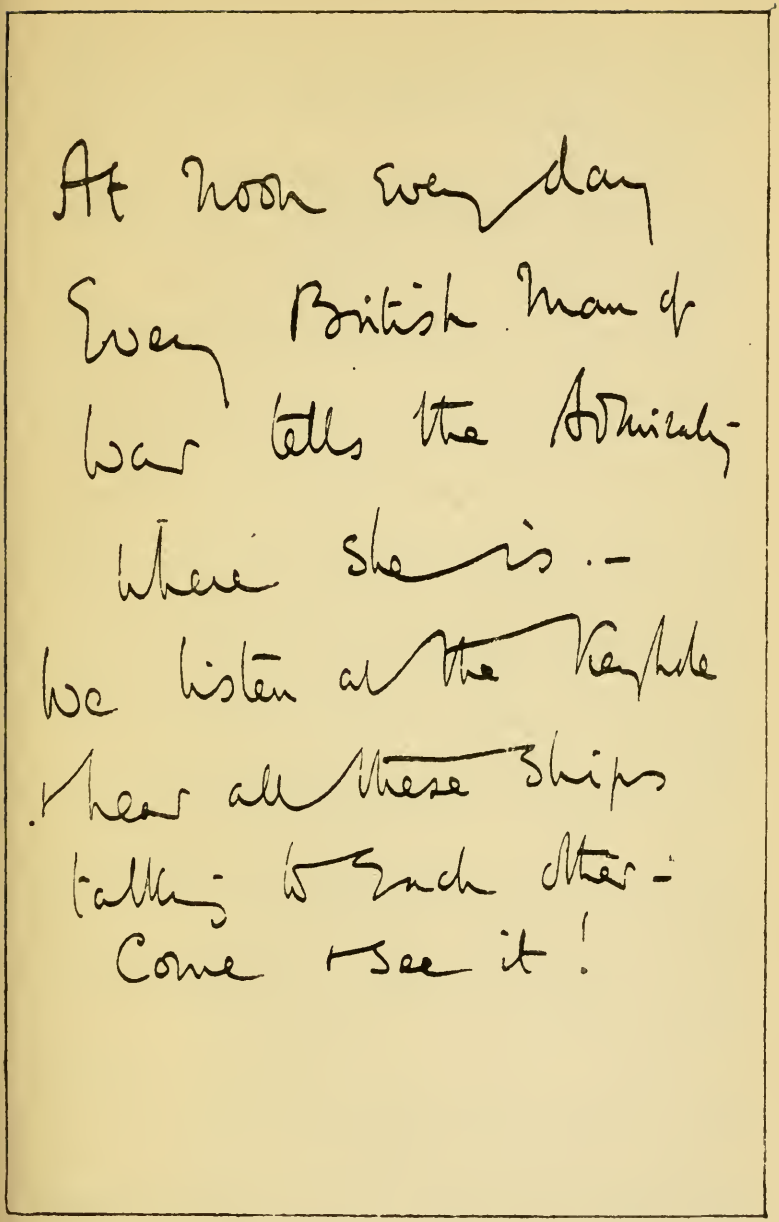
There was a great opportunity at the outbreak of



Dear Mr. Asquith
I will call for you at
10 Downing Street at
10.50 on Friday -
I hope the Prime Minister
will come also - He
will like to see the
'wireless' & the Admiralty
listening


at the Keyhole
also to see the
942 German
merchant ships
& how we sank
them up! and
then the proof


that we are the
lost 10 tribes
of Israel. (I must
not forget that!)
Yours truly
J. A. Fisher
9. 6. 09



Postscript to a letter to me from Lord Fisher asking me to go and see the wireless working at the Admiralty in 1914.

M

10 Downing Street, August, 1914

war of treating the Irish as citizens instead of as outlaws, but their desire to recruit in the same regiments and divisions, and take their priests with them did not appeal to Lord Kitchener.

I begged him with all the eloquence I could command when he came to tea with me one afternoon in Downing Street, to let the Irish have their priests, but he remained obdurate and their desire to fight was snubbed and never returned.

Upon one matter Lord Kitchener's judgment amounted to genius. No ordinary man would have foreseen that had we attempted to apply Conscription a day earlier than we did we should have checked the enthusiasm that brought masses of men of their own free will into our army; that industrial troubles must have broken out all over the country, and that we should have transported sulky soldiers to France instead of men inspired by a great faith. In this he showed moral imagination of a rare order. He was also perfectly straight over the munition controversy, showing character and independence when the Press and the gossips started their campaign in the country to get rid of him and my husband.

So much nonsense has been written and believed over the shell controversy that it should be ploughing the sands—to quote an expression of my husband's—to re-open it; the prejudiced would not be converted, and all the men who count know the truth to-day. I will only say that shells cannot be produced by a wave of the wand or any amount of commands, and that the same complaint was being raised by every army in Europe.

In this connection I will repeat what Lord French said to me, on Friday, July the 2nd, 1915, after the formation of the first Coalition.

"You must not be depressed, Mrs. Asquith," Sir John French said to me, "all armies are in want of

munitions. We found a letter on a dead German officer, written to his wife, in which he says, ' we are doing no good in this line ; we are infernally badly led and have not enough munitions.' "

At the outbreak of war in August, 1914, a contract was signed with America for twenty-nine million rounds of ammunition—a bold order considering, not only people in high society, but every General and Admiral we saw, thought the war would be over in a few months—but the indecision at Headquarters in France as to the kind of shell they most wanted, and the delay in carrying out the orders in America, made the position of both the factories and the Prime Minister almost unbearable.

It would have been easy for my husband to have told the public at the time of the many letters he had received both from Lord French and Lord Kitchener, on the perfect adequacy of our daily increasing supply of shells, but he refused against all the entreaties of his friends throughout the whole intrigue of the Press and other persons to defend himself at the expense of the High Command. This earned him the warm private gratitude both of Lord Kitchener and Sir John French. But it was shown in an unequal degree by them in public, and I doubt if any man could recover his reputation after ascribing the early failures of the war to a dead enemy or a living friend.

Nothing that happened from August, 1914, till December, 1916, disproved the truth of the saying: "*La guerre est trop serieuse pour la laisser aux militaires*," and, though the burden of the mistakes of both business men and the Generals was heavy at the time and hurt us subsequently, my husband never regretted bearing it.

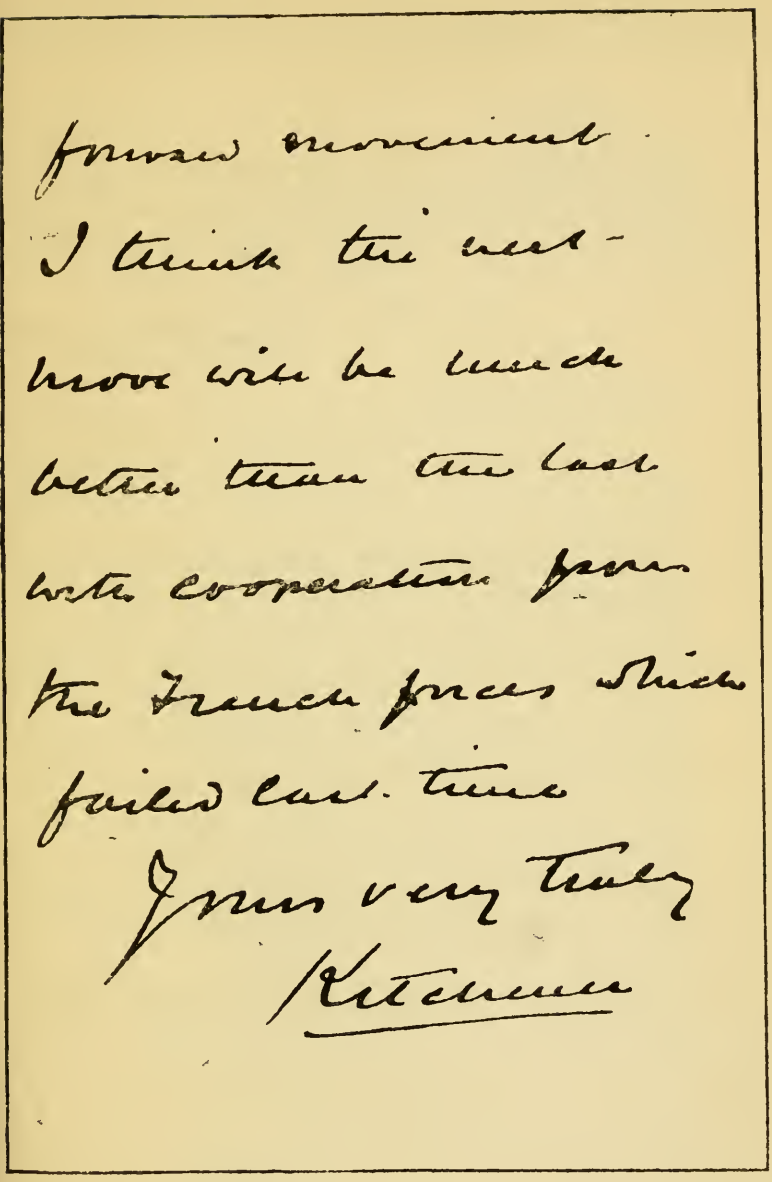
The tragedy of Lord Kitchener was in the manner of his death more than its occurrence. He died before the criticisms of his colleagues were known to the public—after he had had a great personal triumph in the House

F (Apr 1915)

14th WAR OFFICE,
WHITEHALL,
S.W.

My dear Prime Minister

I have had a talk
with French. He told me
I could let you know
that with the present
supply of ammunition
he will have as much
as his troops will be
able to use on the next



forward movement.
I think the next
move will be much
better than the last
with cooperation from
the French forces which
failed last time.
Yours very truly
Kitchener

of Commons ; and to us who knew and loved him he will always be an heroic figure.

. . . . . .

The two Ministers in the Cabinet whose motives for resigning were unimpeachable, and indeed to their credit, were Lord Morley and Mr John Burns. I publish their letters :

"*August 4th*, 1914.

"My dear Asquith,

"Your letter shakes me terribly. It goes to my very core. In spite of temporary moments of difference, my feelings for you have been cordial, deep and close, from your earliest public days. The idea of severing these affectionate associations has been far the most poignant element in the stress of the last four days. But I cannot conceal from myself that we—I and the leading men of the Cabinet—do not mean the same thing in the foreign policy of the moment. To bind ourselves to France is at the same time to bind ourselves to Russia, and to whatever demands may be made by Russia or France. With this cardinal difference between us, how can I honourably or usefully sit in a Cabinet day after day, discussing military and diplomatic details, in carrying forward a policy that I think a mistake ? Again, I say divided counsels are a mistake.

"I am more distressed in making this reply to your generous and most moving appeal than I have ever been in writing any letter of all my life.

"Ever yours,

"Morley."

METROPOLITAN STATION,
SOUTHFIELDS

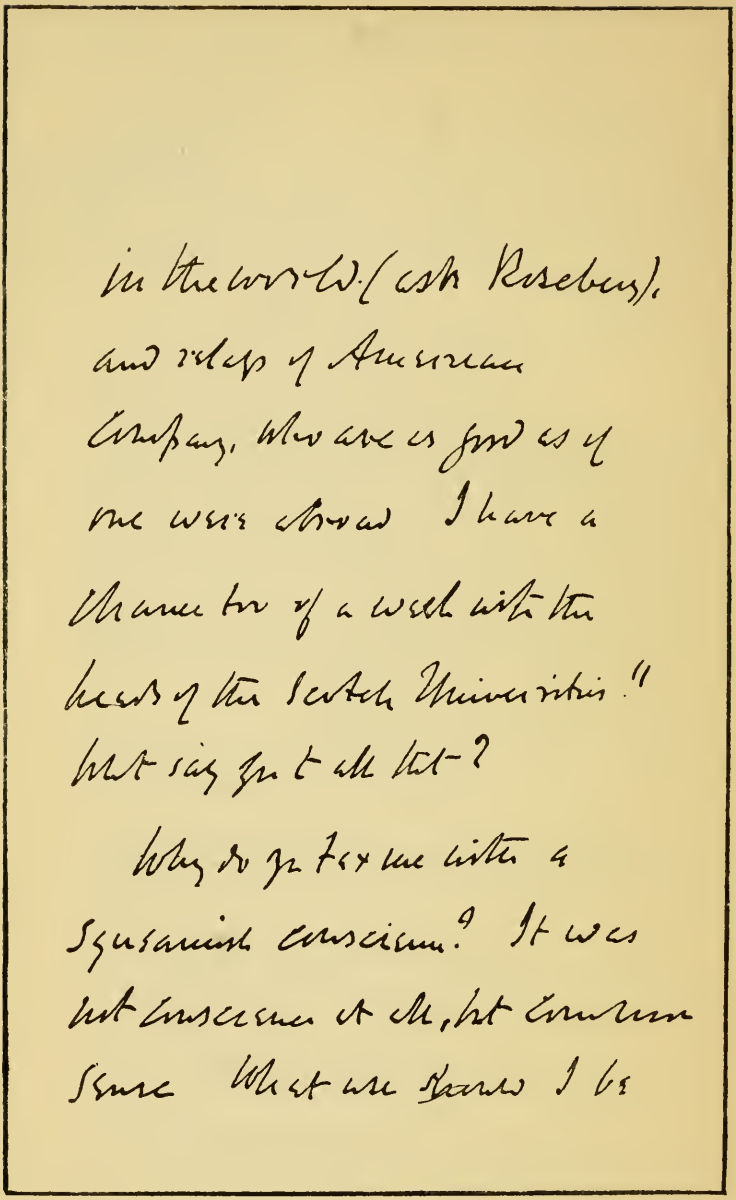
Aug. 9. 14.

FLOWERMEAD
PRINCES ROAD,
WIMBLEDON PARK,
S.W.

Dear Mrs. Asquith,

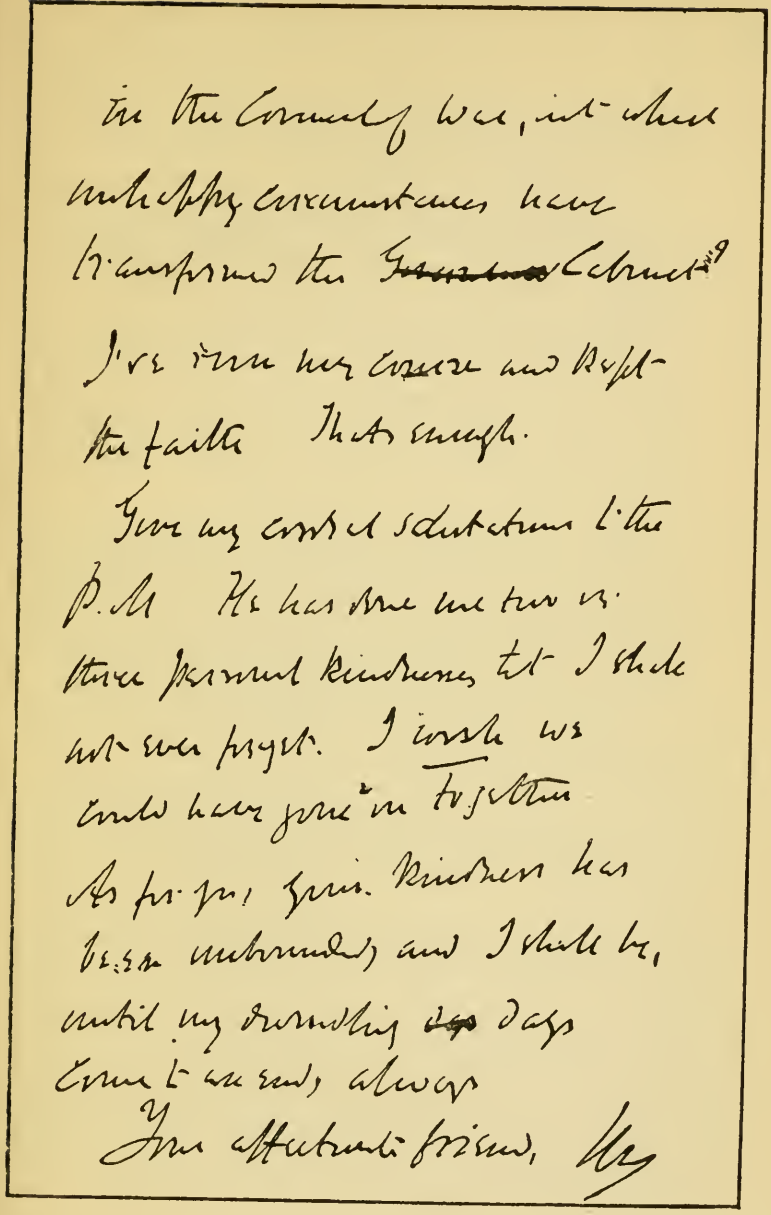
The severance has been a sore affliction, but do be sure — if you care — that, so far as I am concerned, no wound is left, hardly a scratch.

To-morrow we start for Starbo (the owner of which has for the moment joined the Tango persuasion) There I find a little yacht, a library collected by Acton, the most charming hosters



in the world. (ask Rosebery).
and relays of American
Company, who are as good as of
one were abroad I have a
chance too of a week with the
heads of the Scotch Universities."
What say you to all that?

Why do you tax me with a
Squeamish conscience? It was
not conscience at all, but common
sense What use should I be



10 Downing Street, 1914

"LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOARD,
"WHITEHALL, S.W.,
"*Aug. 17th*, 1914.

"DEAR MRS. ASQUITH,

"Many thanks for your kindly letter, the sentiments of which I reciprocate.

"I am in the suburbs and disinclined, at least for the present, to give you any impressions of what transpired on August 4th (remember Quatre Septembre).

"What happened then is of less consequence now than what will happen next week. We are very busy here. I am engaged in hunting our relief works and have been successful in getting sufficient for at least 20,000 men for five months, capable of further extension as necessity compels.

"We are confronted with all the philanthropic mischief of the social butterflies and sentimental busybodies, Lady Bountiful competing with Lady Prodigal for the smiles of the poor and the bibulous cheers of the loafers in distributing other people's money at the cost of the character of all the poor.

"But we are sitting on their heads, as the cabman would say, and after a fortnight's firmness getting our own way with them.

"Our eight years' experience at L.G.B., the few but splendid people we got round us, and the excellent civil servants will pull us through this awful ordeal in London.

"I never worked harder in my life than during the past months, but there never was a soul more at ease nor a happier spirit than I am, with no resentment but only a noble pity for those who succumb to the diseased ambition of writing their diaries in *red* instead of black. The sadness, badness and madness of it all fills one with a merciful condolence rather than a glazing wrath, but the wrath will come.

"The sun here is warm, the common bright and green, the sheep are browsing in a field across the way, and the temper and behaviour of the people in the streets superb.

"But in Belgium the serried ranks of soldiers are waiting to be mown down in swathes by the deadly scythe founded by angry statesmen, and wielded by the men of war for the errors of the diplomats who have blundered, and at the cost of the people who have trusted, and the millions who will suffer. By the way, it was almost worth having a war to get rid of the suffragettes.

"With all good wishes,

"Yours ever,

"JOHN BURNS."

Monday, August 3rd, 1914

I had no opportunity of asking my husband on the morning of the 3rd about the resignations as I never saw him before I went to the House of Commons.

Our Foreign Minister was to make his historic speech, and when I arrived the House was crowded.

Sir Edward Grey rose and said:

*"Last week I stated that we were working for peace not only for this country, but to preserve the peace of Europe. To-day's events move so rapidly that it is exceedingly difficult to state with accuracy the actual state of affairs, but it is clear that the peace of Europe cannot be preserved.

"Before I proceed to state the position of His Majesty's Government, I would like to clear the ground so that the House may know exactly under what obligations the Government can be said to be in coming to a decision on the matter. First of all, let me say that we have consistently worked with a single mind, and all the earnestness in our power, to preserve peace. But we have failed because there has been little time, and a dis-

* I have only had space for a short transcript of this great speech.

Monday, August 3rd, 1914

position—at any rate in some quarters—to force things to an issue, the result of which is that the policy of peace, as far as the Great Powers are concerned, is in danger. I do not want to dwell on that, or say where the blame seems to us to lie, because I would like the House to approach the crisis in which we now are from the point of view of British interests, British honour and British obligations, free from all passion. The French Fleet is now in the Mediterranean, and the Northern and Western coasts of France undefended. It has been concentrated there because of the confidence and friendship which has existed between our two countries. My own feeling is that if a foreign fleet engaged in a war which France had not sought, and in which she had not been the aggressor, came down the English Channel and bombarded and battered the undefended coasts of France, we could not stand aside and see this going on practically within our sight, with folded arms!

"I want to look at the matter without sentiment, and from the point of view of British interests, and it is on that that I am going to justify what I say to the House. If we say nothing at this moment, what is France to do with her Fleet in the Mediterranean? If she leaves it there, with no statement from us, she leaves her Northern and Western coasts at the mercy of a German fleet coming down the Channel, to do as it pleases in a war which is a war of life and death between them. If we say nothing, it may be that the French fleet is withdrawn from the Mediterranean. We are in the presence of a European conflagration; can anybody set limits to the consequences that may arise out of it? Let us assume that we stand aside in an attitude of neutrality, saying: 'No, we cannot undertake and engage to help either party in this conflict.' Let us suppose the French Fleet is withdrawn from the Mediterranean, and let us assume that the consequences make it necessary at a sudden moment, in defence of vital British interests, we should go to war:

" Nobody can say that in the course of the next few weeks there is any particular trade route, the keeping open of which may not be vital to this country. We feel strongly that France was entitled to know—and to know at once—whether or not, in the event of attack upon her unprotected Northern and Western Coasts, she could depend upon British support. In these compelling circumstances, yesterday afternoon, I gave the French Ambassador the following statement : Monday, August 3rd, 1914

> " ' I am authorised to give an assurance that, if the German Fleet comes into the Channel or through the North Sea to undertake hostile operations against the French coasts, the British Fleet will give all the protection in its power. This assurance is, of course, subject to the policy of His Majesty's Government receiving the support of Parliament, and must not be taken as binding His Majesty's Government to take any action until the above contingency of action by the German Fleet takes place.'

" I read that to the House, not as a declaration of war on our part, but as binding us to take aggresive action should that contingency arise.

" Things move hurriedly from hour to hour. French news comes in, which I cannot give in any formal way, but I understand that the German Government would be prepared, if we would pledge ourselves to neutrality, to agree that its fleet would not attack the Northern coast of France. I have only heard that shortly before I came to the House, but it is too narrow an engagement for us. And, Sir, there is the more serious consideration—the question of the neutrality of Belgium.

" Before I reached the House I was informed that the following telegram had been received from the King of the Belgians by our King George :

" ' Remembering the numerous proofs of Your Majesty's friendship and that of your predecessors,

Monday, August 3rd, 1914

and the friendly attitude of England in 1870, and the proof of friendship she has just given us again, I make a supreme appeal to the Diplomatic intervention of Your Majesty's Government to safeguard the integrity of Belgium.'

"We have vital interests in the independence of Belgium. If she is compelled to submit to her neutrality being violated, the situation is clear. Even if by agreement she admitted the violation of her neutrality, she could only do so under duresse. The one desire of the Smaller States is that they should be left alone and independent. The one thing they fear is, I think, not so much that their integrity but that their independence should be interfered with. If, in this war which is before Europe, the neutrality of one of those countries is violated, and no action be taken to resent it, at the end of the war, whatsoever the integrity may be, the independence will be gone. It may be said, I suppose, that we might stand aside, husband our strength, and, whatever happened in the course of this war, at the end of it intervene with effect to put things right; but for us, with a powerful Fleet, which we believe able to protect our commerce, our shores, and our interests, we shall suffer but little more if we engage in war than if we stand aside.

"We are going to suffer terribly in either case. Foreign trade is going to stop, not because the routes are closed, but because there is no trade at the other end. Continental nations with all their populations, energies, and wealth, engaged in a desperate struggle, cannot carry on the trade with us that they are carrying on in times of peace. I do not believe for a moment that at the end of this war, even if we stood aside, we should be in a position to use our force decisively to undo what had happened, or prevent the whole of the West of Europe falling under the domination of a single Power, and I am quite sure that our moral position would be such as to have lost us all respect.

" There is but one way in which we could make certain at the present moment of keeping outside this War, and that would be to issue a proclamation of unconditional neutrality. We cannot do that.

" The most awful responsibility is resting upon the Government in deciding what to advise. We have disclosed the issue and made clear to the House, I trust, that should the situation develop we will face it. How hard, how persistently, and how earnestly we strove for peace last week, the House will see from the papers that will be put before it ; but that is over. If, as seems probable, we are forced to take our stand upon the issues that I have put before the House, then I believe when the country realizes what is at stake, and the magnitude of the impending dangers, we shall be supported throughout, not only by the House of Commons, but by the determination, the courage, and the endurance of the whole country."

Sir Edward Grey sat down in a hurricane of applause and the news of his statement instantly spread all over London.

When we returned to Downing Street the crowd was so great that extra police had to be brought from Scotland Yard to clear the way for our motor. I looked at the excited cheerers, and from the happy expression on their faces you might have supposed that they welcomed the war.

I have met with men who loved stamps, and stones, and snakes, but I could not imagine any man loving war.

Too exhausted to think I lay sleepless in bed.

Bursts of cheering broke like rockets in a silent sky, and I listened to snatches of " God Save the King " shouted in front of the Palace all through the night.

. . . . . .

Declaration of War.
Tuesday, August 4th, 1914.

Downing Street was full of anxious and excited people as we motored to the House of Commons the next day: some stared, some cheered, and some lifted their hats in silence.

I sat breathless with my face glued to the grille of the gallery when my husband rose to announce that an ultimatum had been sent to Germany. He said:

"In conformity with the statement of policy made here by my right hon. friend the Foreign Secretary, yesterday, a telegram was early this morning sent by him to our Ambassador in Berlin. It was to this effect:

"'The King of the Belgians has made an appeal to His Majesty the King for diplomatic intervention on behalf of Belgium. His Majesty's Government are also informed that the German Government has delivered to the Belgian Government a Note proposing friendly neutrality entailing free passage through Belgian territory and promising to maintain the independence and integrity of the Kingdom and its possessions, at the conclusion of peace; threatening in case of refusal to treat Belgium as an enemy. We also understand that Belgium has categorically refused this as a flagrant violation of the law of nations. His Majesty's Government are bound to protest against this violation of a Treaty to which Germany is a party in common with themselves, and must request an assurance that the demand made upon Belgium may not be proceeded with, and that her neutrality will be respected by Germany. You should ask for an immediate reply.'

"We received this morning from our Minister at Brussels the following telegram:

"'German Minister has this morning addressed Note to the Belgian Minister for Foreign Affairs stating that as, Belgian Government have declined the well-intended

proposals submitted to them by the Imperial Government, the latter will, deeply to their regret, be compelled to carry out, if necessary by force of arms, the measures considered indispensable in view of the French menaces.' Tuesday, August 4th, 1914

" Simultaneously—almost immediately afterwards—we received from the Belgian Legation here in London the following telegram :

" ' General staff announces that territory has been violated at Gemmenich (near Aix-la-Chapelle).'

" Subsequent information tends to show that the German force has penetrated still further into Belgian territory. We also received this morning from the German Ambassador here the telegram sent to him by the German Foreign Secretary, and communicated by the Ambassador to us. It is in these terms :

" ' Please dispel any mistrust that may subsist on the part of the British Government with regard to our intentions by repeating most positively formal assurance that, even in the case of armed conflict with Belgium, Germany will under no pretence whatever annex Belgian territory. Sincerity of this declaration is borne out by the fact that we solemnly pledged our word to Holland strictly to respect her neutrality. It is obvious that we could not profitably annex Belgic territory without making, at the same time, territorial acquisitions at expense of Holland. Please impress upon Sir E. Grey that German Army could not be exposed to French attack across Belgium, which was planned according to absolutely unimpeachable information. Germany had consequently to disregard Belgic neutrality, it being for her a question of life or death to prevent French advance.' "

Henry paused after this and then said in a slow, loud voice :

" I have to add on behalf of His Majesty's Government: We cannot regard this as in any sense a satisfactory communication. We have, in reply to it, repeated the

request we made last week to the German Government, that they should give us the same assurance in regard to Belgian neutrality as was given to us and to Belgium by France last week We have asked that a reply to that request, and a satisfactory answer to the telegram of this morning—which I have read to the House—should be given before midnight."

I looked at the House, which was packed from gallery to floor while my husband was speaking, and through misty eyes the heads of the listening members appeared to me as if bowed in prayer.

. . *"A satisfactory answer before midnight . . ."* . .

These fateful and terrible words were greeted by wave upon wave of cheering, which continued and increased as Henry rose and walked slowly down the floor of the House.

Few understood why he went down to the Bar, and when he turned and faced the Speaker, excitement knew no bounds.

I quote from Hansard:

"THE PRIME MINISTER at the Bar acquainted the House that he had a message from His Majesty, signed by His Majesty's own hand, and he presented the same to the House, and it was read by Mr. Speaker (all the Members of the House being uncovered), and it is as followeth:

"'GEORGE R.I.—The present state of public affairs in Europe constituting in the opinion of His Majesty a case of great emergency within the meaning of the Acts of Parliament in that behalf, His Majesty deems it proper to provide additional means for the Military Service, and therefore, in pursuance of these Acts, His Majesty has thought it right to communicate to the House of Commons that His Majesty is, by proclamation, about to order that the Army Reserve shall be called out on permanent service, that soldiers who would otherwise be entitled, in pursuance of the terms of their enlistment,

to be transferred to the Reserve shall continue in Army Service for such period not exceeding the period for which they might be required to serve if they were transferred to the Reserve and called out for permanent service as to His Majesty may seem expedient, and that such directions as may seem necessary may be given for embodying the Territorial Force and for making such special arrangements as may be proper with regard to units or individuals whose services may be required in other than a military capacity.' "

When the Speaker had finished reading the King's message all the members poured out of the House, and I went down to the Prime Minister's room.

Henry looked grave and gave me John Morley's letter of resignation, saying :

" I shall miss him very much ; he is one of the most distinguished men living."

For some time we did not speak. I left the window and stood behind his chair :

" So it is all up ? " I said.

He answered without looking at me :

" Yes, it's all up."

I sat down beside him with a feeling of numbness in my limbs and absently watched through the half-open door the backs of moving men. A secretary came in with Foreign Office boxes, he put them down and went out of the room.

Henry sat at his writing-table leaning back with a pen in his hand. . . . What was he thinking of ? . . . His sons ? . . . My son was too young to fight ; would they all have to fight ? . . . I got up and leant my head against his : we could not speak for tears.

When I arrived in Downing Street I went to bed.

How *did* it . . . how *could* it have happened ? What were we all like five days ago ? We were talking about Ireland and civil war ; Civil war ! People were angry but not serious ; and now the sound of real war waved

like wireless round our heads and the whole world was listening.

I looked at the children asleep after dinner before joining Henry in the Cabinet room. Lord Crewe and Sir Edward Grey were already there and we sat smoking cigarettes in silence ; some went out, others came in ; nothing was said.

The clock on the mantelpiece hammered out the hour, and when the last beat of midnight struck it was as silent as dawn.

We were at War.

I left to go to bed, and, as I was pausing at the foot of the staircase, I saw Winston Churchill with a happy face striding towards the double doors of the Cabinet room.

CHAPTER VIII

War.

10 Downing Street
August 6th, 1914

On the morning of the 6th of August my husband had it announced in the papers that Lord Kitchener had become Secretary of State for War, and in the afternoon I went to the House of Commons to hear him move his Motion for a vote of credit of £100,000,000. I will quote some of his speech.

"I do not propose to traverse the ground which was covered by my right hon. friend the Foreign Secretary. He stated the ground upon which with the utmost reluctance His Majesty's Government have been compelled to put this country in a state of war with what for many years and indeed in generations past has been a friendly Power. If I am asked what we are fighting for I reply in two sentences. In the first place to fulfil a solemn international obligation, which no self-respecting man could possibly have repudiated. Secondly, we are fighting to vindicate the principle which, in these days, when force seems to be the dominant influence in the development of mankind, we are not to be crushed, by the arbitrary will of an overmastering Power. I do not believe any nation ever entered into a great controversy with a clearer conscience. With a full conviction, not only of the wisdom and justice, but of the obligations which lay upon us to challenge this great issue, we are entering into the struggle. Let us now make sure that all

August 6th, 1914

the resources, not only of this United Kingdom, but of the vast Empire of which it is the centre, shall be thrown into the scale, and it is with that object that I am now about to ask this Committee to give the Government a Vote of Credit of £100,000,000. I am asking also in my character of Secretary of State for War—a position which I held until this morning—for a Supplementary Estimate for men for the Army. Glad as I should have been to continue the work of that Office, it would not be fair to the Army, or just to the country, that any Minister should divide his attention between that department and another, still less that the First Minister of the Crown, who is ultimately responsible for the whole policy of the Cabinet, should give perfunctory attention to the affairs of our Army in a great war. I am glad to say that a distinguished soldier has at my request stepped into the breach, and I am certain he will have with him the complete confidence of all parties and all opinions.

"I am asking on his behalf for the Army power to increase the number of men of all ranks, in addition to the number already voted, by no less than 500,000. I am certain the Committee will not refuse its sanction, for we are encouraged to ask for it not only by our own sense of the gravity and the necessities of the case, but by the knowledge that India is prepared to send us certainly two divisions, and that every one of our self-governing Dominions spontaneously, and unasked, has already tendered every help they can afford to the Empire in a moment of need. The Mother Country must set the example, while she responds with gratitude and affection to those filial overtures from the outlying members of her family.

"Sir, I will say no more. This is not an occasion for controversial discussion. In all that I have said I have not gone beyond the strict bounds of truth. It is not my purpose to inflame feeling, to indulge in rhetoric or to excite international animosities. The occasion is

far too grave for that. We have a great duty to perform, a great trust to fulfil, and confidently we believe that Parliament and the country will enable us to do it." August 6th, 1914

When Henry resumed his seat the whole House roared with applause and everyone was moved. I found myself speculating on when he could have prepared any of this speech (of which I have given but a short transcript). I knew he had been working most of the night as I had found him writing at two that morning. He told me afterwards that he had neither written nor prepared a single line of it.

On leaving the House I met my dear old friend, Lord Chaplin, who asked me if he could drive me to 10 Downing Street.

" I am proud, my dear, to be seen with you," he said, with that fine courtesy with which we are all familiar. " If anyone had told me that any Prime Minister could have come to this House and asked for a vote of credit of a hundred million pounds and got a unanimous vote, I should have said the thing was impossible. I'm not saying it because I am an old pal, but, my dear Mrs. Asquith, I think—and I am not the only one—that your husband is the most remarkable man living. He and Grey have started this war in a memorable way."

On the 9th the King's Message to the Army and Lord Kitchener's advice were published : August 9th, 1914

MESSAGE FROM THE KING

"BUCKINGHAM PALACE.

" You are leaving home to fight for the safety and honour of my Empire.

" Belgium, whose country we are pledged to defend, has been attacked, and France is about to be invaded by the same powerful foe.

August 9th, 1914

"I have implicit confidence in you, my soldiers. Duty is your watchword, and I know your duty will be nobly done.

"I shall follow your every movement with deepest interest and mark with eager satisfaction your daily progress; indeed, your welfare will never be absent from my thoughts.

"I pray God to bless you and guard you and bring you back victorious.

"GEORGE, R.I.

"*9th August*, 1914."

"LORD KITCHENER'S ADVICE

"THE TRUE CHARACTER OF A BRITISH SOLDIER.

"The following instructions have been issued by Lord Kitchener to every soldier in the Expeditionary Army, to be kept in his Active Service Pay Book:—

"You are ordered abroad as a soldier of the King to help our French comrades against the invasion of a common enemy. You have to perform a task which will need your courage, your energy, your patience. Remember that the honour of the British Army depends on your individual conduct.

"It will be your duty not only to set an example of discipline and perfect steadiness under fire, but also to maintain the most friendly relations with those whom you are helping in this struggle. The operations in which you are engaged will, for the most part, take place in a friendly country, and you can do your own country no better service than in showing yourself in France and Belgium in the true character of a British soldier.

"Be invariably courteous, considerate and kind. Never do anything likely to injure or destroy property,

and always look upon looting as a disgraceful act. You are sure to meet with a welcome and to be trusted ; your conduct must justify that welcome and that trust. August 9th, 1914

" Your duty cannot be done unless your health is sound. So keep constantly on your guard against any excesses. In this new experience you may find temptations both in wine and women. You must entirely resist both temptations, and, while treating all women with perfect courtesy, you should avoid any intimacy.

" Do your duty bravely,

" Fear God,

" Honour the King.

" KITCHENER,

" Field-Marshal."

I might have been reading an old Memoir of some great soldier had this appeared on any printed page a week before, but, in the short five days since the Declaration of War, one's mind had got attuned, and whatever you read or heard could not affect it.

In the course of that afternoon, I was summoned to Buckingham Palace to see the Queen ; she asked me to sit with her upon a Committee to settle what needlework should be done to help our soldiers, and I went to our first meeting on the 10th.

A fine room was crowded with ladies of every shade of opinion, sitting round a large table ; Peeresses and Commoners, journalists' wives and Ministers' wives, and an animated discussion took place on what form of needlework we should start all over the country. I suggested it would not be popular to do anything that would compete with the shops, and said I would undertake to make surgical shirts. August 10th, 1914

Lady Lansdowne sat on my right, and Princess Mary on my left, and next to her sat the Queen. Everyone was brave and cheerful but I felt horribly depressed, and after listening to a great many suggestions, some trivial,

August 10th, 1914 and some important, I returned to Downing Street where I had an appointment to say good-bye to Sir John French.

I found him waiting for me on my arrival and we had a long and memorable conversation. I asked him to give me any trifle that would remind me to pray for him, and I gave him a small silver-gilt saint which he put in his pocket.

I travelled north that night to join my little son on the Moray Firth. Before leaving for the train I talked to Henry in his dressing room.

I found him reading "Our Mutual Friend." He told me he was going to read all the Dickens' novels, as they removed his thoughts if only for a short time from Colleagues and Allies, and we went on to discuss his Cabinet.

In reading my diary to-day, in which I record the whole of this conversation, I am struck by the insight he shewed upon that occasion about the men who were working both for and against us, in and out of the Cabinet, and could almost wish he had been less patient with some of the Colleagues he criticised. When I alluded to the recognised brilliance of two of them, he said:

"I could do with less cleverness: and should feel no anxiety if I had a few more Crewes and Greys. In public politics as in private life, character is better than brains, and loyalty more valuable than either; but," he added, "I shall have to work with the material that has been given to me! Dictatorships generally end in disaster."

I received the following letter forwarded from 10 Downing Street, when I was in Scotland:

"94 Lancaster Gate, W.
"*August 10th*, 1914.

"My dear Mrs. Asquith,

"I have cut the *A.D.C. General* badges off my horsecloth and enclose them. It is the sort of thing

you said—in your great kindness of heart—you would like. I am not going to say 'Good-bye' but 'Au revoir.' Thank you a thousand times for your kind and affectionate friendship. August 10th, 1914

"Yours,

"J. D. P. FRENCH."

Although irrelevant, I must quote a conversation here that Anthony and I had on the day that I received this letter.

We were sitting by the sea watching the gulls hovering over the Firth, and, after reading my letters, I asked him what sort of a wife he would like to have. Hopeman, Moray Firth, August 11th, 1914

"Well, mother," he said thoughtfully, "she must be medium high, pale complexion, dark gold hair, black eyes. She must have free movements and not walk like modern girls. She must not have an anæmic nature, as I don't want a bloodless wife, and she must be witty, sweet and musical. If I can't get this girl, I will have a short well-proportioned wife; black hair, violet eyes or green, like Kakoo's*; Spanish colouring as against red. Nature fiery almost passionate, but of course her temper must be quickly over. Mother, how shall I know her children from mine?"

Henry wrote to me daily while I was at Hopeman. The following are quotations from his letters:

"*August 17th*, 1914. The Turk threatens to give trouble in Egypt and elsewhere, and the Germans are doing all they can to get hold of him. Winston is quite prepared to send a swarm of flotillas into the Dardanelles to torpedo the "Goeben" if necessary. Three of our Divisions are now in their positions at the Front, south of Maubeuge, and the other two will soon be with them. French has arrived at his headquarters.

"*August 18th*, 1914. The curtain is lifted to-day and

* The Marchioness of Granby.

Hopeman, Moray Firth, August 11th, 1914

people begin to realise what an extraordinary thing has been done during the last ten days. The poor old War Office, which has been a by-word for inefficiency, has proved itself more than up-to-date: for which the credit is mainly due to Haldane and the Committee of Defence. The Navy, too, has been admirable: not a single torpedo has slipped through either end of the Channel.

"I am disgusted with the optimism of the Press and other people, believing all the nonsense about great Belgian victories and the Germans already demoralized and starving or committing suicide. All that has gone on so far—except at Liege—is a mere affair of outposts, and it looks to-day as if the Germans were going to occupy Brussels. The splendid thing the Belgians have done is to stop them on their road and throw out the whole of their time-table. Our force is by this time for the most part in its proper place. I met Jules Cambon at the French Embassy to-day. He says the Kaiser, who is '*vaniteux et poseur,*' was overborne by the militarists and Bismarckian reactionaries, also by jealousy of the Crown Prince. He has a poor opinion of Bethmann Hollweg '*un homme très mediocre—en même temps bourgeois et courtisan—combinaison mauvaise.*' He told Jagow at their last interview that the Germans would be beaten—conquered, as Napoleon was, by '*les deux Puissances intangibles*'—England and Russia.

"*19th August,* 1914. Kitchener thinks the Germans are going in for a large enveloping movement which will enable them to have a dash at the French positions between Lille and Maubeuge. He is very good on these things, and predicted this a week ago, when all the French officers declared it was impossible. He is very useful in Council on his own and kindred topics and most pleasant to work with."

Not liking to be separated long from my husband I left Anthony and travelled from Scotland to London on the 23rd of August.

I will quote from my diary of the events which followed.

From my Diary, August 24th 1914

" On August 24th, Henry came into my room looking very grave: he read me Sir John French's telegram and added:

" ' Bad news, the Germans have taken Namur. We've been driven back with the French. Terrible fighting since Saturday. We shall have an awful list of casualties. I *cannot* understand how Namur *can* have fallen if it's as strongly fortified as we are told. The position now is very serious, I must go and see K., and then we have our Cabinet.'

" The news came as a thunderclap to me: it seemed terrible to think that the first time our fresh, wonderful troops were in battle they should have had to retreat. Henry told me K. had cursed and sworn when he read the telegram and that he (Henry) much feared the French had been outgeneralled and wondered if our Army had been cut off.

" General Sir John Cowans, who lunched with us, said:

" ' I expect we've lost about 6,000 men all told—if so it's very good.'

" Appalled by his statement I asked if this would be considered good, to which he replied:

" ' Ah! Mrs. Asquith, the losses in this war will be tremendous for everyone. I am afraid the French have been too dashing or wrong in their strategy.'

" Knowing from Headquarters that our Army had been forced to retreat we waited all the afternoon to hear whether our men had been cut off.

" After an interrupted dinner, for which we did not dress, Henry and all of us sat in his sitting-room upstairs like people in a Maeterlinck play, saying either trivial things or nothing at all (Henry and I, Arthur Asquith, the Harcourts, my dear friend Ernley Blackwell,* Sir Eric Drummond and the other Secretaries.)

* Sir Ernley Blackwell (Home Office).

From my Diary, August 24th 1914

"Cabinet Minister after Cabinet Minister walked in unannounced, and with anxious faces asked if there had been any further telegrams.

"Eric Drummond, who had left us to make enquiries, returned:

"'They say, Sir,' he said, 'a despatch has arrived and is being deciphered in the War Office.'

"On hearing this Henry left us and went down to the Cabinet room. I followed him and stood at the top of the stair watching anxious Ministers, and groups of officials waiting and talking in the corridor, while Eric ran back to the War Office. I joined Henry, whom I found alone; I sat in silence while he ran through a mass of papers.

"Eric Drummond told us on his return that the deciphered message had gone to Lord Kitchener, but that no one knew where he was, or what was in the telegram. At this Henry looked furiously angry: the door opened and various officials came into the room.

"Everyone spoke at the same time:

"'Why was a bed and bath put into the War Office if K. doesn't sleep there?'

"'I hear he was dining with Arthur Balfour,' someone said, at which someone else exclaimed:

"'I doubt if he or anyone else could keep Arthur up after 11 o'clock.'

"A voice of more authority suggested that as Lady Wantage had lent Kitchener her house we should telephone to him there; at which Eric Drummond went into the other room and took up the telephone, some of us following:

"'Hullo!! . . . Hullo!!! . . . I am the Prime Minister's Secretary. Who are you? . . . . Yes . . yes . . . the butler? . . . . . all right . . . . . tell Lord Kitchener the Prime Minister wants to see the message from General French At Once. Hullo!!!. . Hullo!!!!. *Do you hear?* . . . *At once.* . . . What??? . . .

From my Diary, August 24th 1914

Oh ! ! Damn ! he's not the butler, and he's gone away.'

" Henry was still alone and in a state of exasperation when I returned to him. He rang the bell and said :

" ' Tell them to find Lord Kitchener at once ; this mustn't happen again—I must have the despatch *at once ;* do you *hear ?* '

" Messengers and secretaries went off in all directions, while we waited in silence for what seemed an eternity of time.

" The door opened at last and Sir William Tyrrell rushed in, hot and breathless, with the telegram :

" ' Loss of over 2,000 men. Fighting since Saturday the 22nd, but all in line again.'

" The communications were still open, and the British Army had not been cut off ! Thank God !

" It was 4 a.m. when we went to bed."

End of Diary quotation

. . . . . .

Motoring with Henry on the afternoon of the 27th, I saw on a street poster—" 300,000 Germans against our men," and asked him if this were possible :

" Yes," he said : " they are three to one, if not more, against our poor fellows."

On the next poster I read :

" Indians come to help " ; and when I asked if this was true he said :

" It was decided at the Cabinet yesterday, although Lord Roberts* was not at all keen about it : our native

* In connection with this, Lady Roberts wrote to the *Sunday Times* (where some of this account was published) casting a doubt on my accuracy, suggesting that it conveyed a wrong impression of her father's love for, and belief in, the Indian Army. I do not think my husband or any other man ever doubted the devotion Lord Roberts had for India or the Army. He may have been mistaken about Lord Roberts' views, but I can only quote what he said to me, and the above account of our conversation he has verified from personal notes taken at the time.

troops that were going to Egypt will now land at Marseilles as we think we must have every man in France."

On our return from the motor drive I found everyone furious with Kitchener. They told me that one of our officers had come back that morning from the front suffering from a slight wound and had asked to see Lord Kitchener. The latter enquired whether he had come from General French, and, hearing that he had not, said :

" Then arrest him ! "

It was an interesting sidelight on K's methods, but as we had been fighting from the 22nd till the 27th of August, and knew none of the names of our dead or wounded, it seemed both autocratic and foolish not to get all possible information, and from anyone we could.

We spent the week-end of August the 30th at my brother Frank's place, Lympne, in Kent.

We had had no news from Sir John French and a telegram we received from the President of the French Republic filled us with apprehension ; this was followed by a long message from Lord Kitchener of such a confidential character that on receiving it we motored up to London on Sunday night, arriving in Downing Street at two in the morning.

At the Cabinet meeting next day my husband took a momentous decision in which the honour of England was involved, and if this advice had been disregarded he would have resigned.

Lord Kitchener was sent on a secret mission to France to tell Sir John French that our army was not to move away from Paris, and to persuade him to take the offensive as soon as possible.

September 3rd, 1914

On the 3rd of September, Henry came into my bedroom :

" Nothing can be more serious than our position," he said, " indeed the whole situation at the front. The French Government has left Paris and gone to Bordeaux."

On the 8th I copied this telegram from our Ambassador* in Paris, which Henry showed me for my Diary: September, 1914

"*Sept. 8th*, 1914, Secret.
"BORDEAUX.

"French Minister at Bucharest has been informed secretly that German Kaiser has written to King of Roumania; that from report of German General, German troops will have crushed Franco-British Forces in 20 days—he will then leave 500,000 German troops in occupation of France and will turn his attention to Russia."

I will end this chapter by quoting an account out of my diary of the only visit I paid to the Front in the Great War.

. . . . . .

From my Diary, December 10th, 1914

"Henry and I went to Hackwood to stay with Lord Curzon to meet the Queen of the Belgians and her children.

"After dinner when I told her I thought the war would certainly last over two years she was amazed and I could see she did not think it would be half as long.

"She asked me to go and stay with her in Belgium and see the fighting Front.

"There was a handsome Scotchman staying in the house, Major Gordon, secretary to the Duke of Wellington, with whom I made friends, and on hearing of Her Majesty's invitation he said he would accompany me; so on the 10th of December, 1914, we started off together.

"I spent an uncomfortable night at the Lord Warden, and at 7 a.m. the next day Major Gordon and I crossed over to Dunkirk in the Admiralty ship, Princess Victoria. I was too sick to see anything on the journey;

* Sir Francis Bertie.

From my Diary, December 10th, 1914

but the captain told me that floating mines and fear of German submarines accounted for our serpentine route and our arrival being delayed by over an hour.

"It was Arctic cold when we arrived, but I wore sensible clothes: leather breeches and coat, a jersey over my blouse, a short serge skirt, a black Belgian soldier's forage-cap and a spotted fur overcoat. All very ugly but businesslike.

"We took untold time to pass through the locks into Dunkirk Harbour. There we were met by a private chauffeur and the best Benz motor I have ever driven in, both smooth and powerful. Our Belgian drove us at a shattering pace on sheer and slippery roads.

"Major Gordon was more than resourceful and kind: quite unfussy, and thinking of everything beforehand.

"We drove straight from the Harbour to Milly Sutherland's* Hospital.

"There among the wounded I saw Arab, Indian and Moor soldiers lying in silence side by side. The distant expression of their mysterious eyes filled me with a profound pity, nor could they speak any understandable language to their nurses or their doctors.

"After leaving the Hospital we went on to the Headquarters of the Belgian Army where we were met by General Tom Bridges, 'the heart and soul' as we were told of the Belgian Army and in many ways a remarkable man.

"He gave us our passwords and passports for the next two days. 'Antoine' from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m., and 'Cassel' from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.

"We had a repelling meal in a dirty restaurant at Furnes before arriving at King Albert's Headquarters.

La Panne, Belgium, December, 1914

"It was 4 o'clock and in drenching rain when we reached La Panne. The King's household received me with courtesy and cordiality in a brick and wooden house built on the sand dunes by the sea. The villa was like

* Lady Millicent Hawes.

From my Diary, La Panne, Belgium, December, 1914

a lodging-house at Littlestone—pegs for hats and coats in a tiny hall, with a straight short wooden stair and no carpets. It was bald, and low, and could only put up seven people—two men-servants, one housemaid, a cook and ourselves.

"Comtesse Caraman-Chimay, the Queen's lady-in-waiting, is a delightful woman with fine manners and a great deal of nature and kindness. The Master of the Horse, M. Davreux—a cavalry officer in the Household—helped the servants to bring my things upstairs into a hideous bedroom, where I was glad enough to retire.

"We messed in the kitchen. The only other sitting-room in the house was a warm, open-fired smoking-room, where we sat after dinner. I was relieved not to have to walk in the rain 200 yards to dine with the King on the night of my arrival, as I was too tired to move.

"We dined early in fur coats, skirts and shirts; and all went to bed at 9.15 after an interesting general conversation upon the war and various other topics.

"My bald bedroom had neither curtains, blinds, nor shutters, and I put on a jersey over my nightgown. On one side the windows looked on to a sort of sand railway, covered with trucks and scattered villas, and the other on to the sea. Telephone and telegraph wires connected all the villas together and glass doors opened out on to brick paths; the whole place was sunny but bleak, and exposed to every gale.

"Luckily for me it was a glorious day when I woke; and I shall not easily forget the beauty of the beach in the early morning. I saw nothing but stretches of yellow sand, and shallow ice-white lines of flat waves, so far out that no tide looked as if it could ever bring them any closer.

"Detachments of mounted soldiers of every nationality and every colour were coming and going on the beach, and an occasional aeroplane floated like a gull upon the air. Troops of Moors (Goumiers, as they call them) rode

From my Diary, La Panne, Belgium, December, 1914

past in twos and twos, mounted on white and grey arabs, tatooing odd instruments with long brown fingers. Though picturesque on the beach, they looked as if they might be ineffectual in battle.

"At 1.30 on December the 12th, the Belgian Commander accompanied me across the brick paths through the sand dunes to the King's villa. My coat was taken off by two footmen in black, and I was shown into the sitting-room, where I found a tall fair man studying a map, and leaning over a low mantelpiece. He turned round and shook hands, and we sat down and began to talk. I thought to myself:

"'You are extraordinarily like your King,' but I have often observed that Court people take on the look of their Kings and Queens, imitation being the sincerest form of flattery.

"It was not till he congratulated me on having a remarkable husband, and alluded in touching terms to Henry's speech on him and the sorrows of Belgium that I suspected who he was. I instantly got up and curtsied to the ground, at which he smiled rather sadly, and, the Queen interrupting us, we all went into the dining-room.

"We had an excellent lunch of soup, roast beef, potatoes, and a sweet flavoured with coffee.

"I found the King easy and delightful; both wise, uncomplaining, and real. He has no swagger, and is keen and interested in many things. I told him I had bought several photographs of him to sign for me to take back to England, but they all had dark hair. He said it was clever of the photographer to give him any hair at all, as he was getting balder daily, and felt that everything about him was both dark and bald.

"He told me, among other things, that the Germans had trained off to Germany all his wife's clothes and underclothes, and all his own wine, adding:

"'As I drink nothing, this is no loss to me, but it is strange for any soldier to steal a woman's clothes.'

From my Diary, La Panne, Belgium, December, 1914

"After lunch M. Davreux, Major Gordon and I motored to the Belgian trenches and on to Pervyse Station. We passed a dead horse lying in a pool of blood and heard the first big guns I had ever heard in my life; the sound of which excited and moved me to the heart. Aeroplanes hovered like birds overhead in a pale and streaky sky.

"We passed a convoy of men with straggling winter trees upon their bent backs going to hide the artillery. For miles round the country was inundated with sea-water; and the roads, where they were not *pavé*, were swamps of deep and clinging mud. The fields were full of holes, and looked like solitaire boards. The houses had been smashed and gutted and were without inhabitants; only a few soldiers could be seen smoking or cooking in the deserted doorways. Every church was littered with bits of bombs, and *débris* of stained glass, twisted ribbons of molten lead, and broken arms of the outstretched Christ.

"Major Gordon had brought a wooden cross with him to put on the grave of the Duke of Richmond's son, and I had taken one out at the request of Lord and Lady Lansdowne to put on their boy's grave at Ypres, where we ultimately arrived.

"The Ypres cemetery will haunt me for ever. No hospital of wounded or dying men could have given me a greater insight into the waste of War than that dripping, gaunt and crowded churchyard. There were broken bits of wood stuck in the grass at the head of hundreds of huddled graves, with English names scrawled upon them in pencil. Where the names had been washed off, forage-caps were hanging, and they were all placed one against the other as closely as possible. I saw a Tommy digging, and said:

"'Who is that grave for?' He answered without stopping or looking at me:

"'For the next . . .'

"Two English officers, holding their caps in their

From my Diary, La Panne, Belgium, December, 1914

hands, were standing talking by the side of an open grave, and single soldiers were dotted about all over the cemetery.

"Major Gordon, who had borrowed a spade, asked me if I would help him by holding the cross upright, which I was only too glad to do till we had finished.

"All the time I was standing in the high wet grass I thought of the Lansdownes and my heart went out to them.

"Suddenly a fusillade of guns burst upon our ears. It seemed as if some of the shells might hit us at any moment, they were so near and loud. Aeroplanes circled over our heads, and every soldier in the cemetery put on his cap and rushed away.

"An excited Belgian officer, with a few other men, ran up to me and, pointing to a high mound, said would I not like to see the German guns, as one could only die *once*.

"As Major Gordon had left me to go to a further cemetery, I was glad enough to accompany them.

"Frightfully excited and almost deafened by the Crack! Crack!! Crack!!! Boom!! Boom!!! I tore up to the top of the hill with the officer holding my elbow.

"Had it not been for a faint haze over the landscape I could have seen everything distinctly. Thin white lines of smoke, like poplars in a row, stood out against the horizon, and I saw the flash of every German gun. My companion said that if the shells had been coming our way they would have gone over our heads; the German troops, he explained, must have come on unknown to them in the night, and he added he did not think that either the Belgians, the British, or the French knew at all what they were up to.

"A French officer, looking furious, arrived panting up the hill and coming up to me said I was to go down and remain under the shelter of the Hospital walls immediately. Two Belgian soldiers who had joined us

From my Diary, La Panne, Belgium, December, 1914

asked me if I was not afraid to stand in the open, so close to the German guns. I said not more than they were, at which we all smiled and shrugged our shoulders ; and the French officer took me down the hill to the Hospital quadrangle, where I waited for Major Gordon.

" The clatter of the guns was making every pane in every window shiver and rattle till I thought they must all break, and sitting in our motor, writing my diary, I felt how much I should have hated fighting.

" A French sentry after eyeing me for some time came up and presented me with his stomach-belt of blue cashmere. I thanked him warmly and gave him six boxes of Woodbine cigarettes, of which I had brought an enormous quantity. A Belgian Tommy, on seeing this, took off his white belt and presented it to me with a salute which moved me very much.

" I began to think Major Gordon must be killed, as he had been away for over an hour. The sun was high and when he returned his face was bathed in perspiration. He told me he had put the Duke of Richmond's cross on his son's grave in a cemetery so close to the German lines that he thought every moment would have been his last, and after munching a few biscuits we started off on our journey south.

" On our way to Merville we stopped at Major Gordon's brother-in-law's house, a cottage at the side of the road. It was pitch dark and we had tea with him in the kitchen, lit by one dim oil lamp.

" We had not been at the table more than a few minutes when a loud sound, like the hissing of an engine, made the whole cottage rock and sway.

" I felt genuinely frightened and wondered what the children were doing at home.

" An aide-de-camp dashed out of the room and came back scarlet in the face.

" ' If you please, sir,' he said, saluting : ' four Jack Johnsons have dropped thirty yards from the door.'

From my Diary, La Panne, Belgium, December, 1914

"General Nicholson jumped up white as a sheet and said to his brother-in-law:

"'Great God, what will the Prime Minister say? I've let you in, my dear Gordon! . . . but I assure you, Mrs. Asquith, we've not had a shell or a shot here for weeks past. . . .'

"I reassured him as to his fears of my personal safety and asked him why the Germans wasted ammunition on such a desolate, inundated spot, to which he replied:

"'Pure accident! But let me tell you, if there had been no water, not a brick in this cottage would have remained above ground, and neither you nor I would have had an eyelash left! . . . Now, Dopp, give us the tea.'

"After leaving our host we pursued our journey and arrived at Merville, where I was the only woman among 20 men who sat down to dinner that night with General Sir Henry Rawlinson.

"It is always a surprise to an amateur why Generals and Ministers have such large staffs, and I have often wondered if they are kept for ornament, companionship, or use; but expect it is an unconscious form of vanity. All the time my husband was Prime Minister he never took a secretary away with him either at home or abroad, but in old days I have known idle and rich young men travel with a loader, a valet, a secretary, a coiffeur and a chiropodist.

"Sir Henry and I knew each other hunting in Leicestershire and he received us with cordial hospitality. He not only gave us an excellent dinner—which was very welcome, as, except for tea and biscuits, we had had nothing to eat since the early morning—but he gave up his own bedroom and bath to me, an act of courtesy for which I shall ever be grateful.

"I was glad to observe how popular my chaperon, Major Gordon, was wherever we went—nor was I surprised, as a better looking, better hearted, more capable and devoted person I have seldom met.

THE PRIME MINISTER AND SIR JOHN FRENCH AT G.H.Q., FRANCE, 1914

From my Diary, La Panne, Belgium, December, 1914

"We left Merville on December the 14th, at 7.30 in the morning, and arrived at Havre that night.

"On looking at the boisterous choppy sea I made up my mind that nothing would induce me to spend twelve hours upon it, so after a peaceful night we motored back to Boulogne, starting at 7 a.m. and got back the same night to London."

End of Diary quotation

As this book is not a history of the war, I do not propose to write chronologically of the campaign, but will end this chapter with a quotation from my diary written on the last day of the year 1914.

From my Diary, December 31st, 1914

"Although this is the last day of the year 1914, will any of us have the heart to talk of a happy New one to-morrow? When I opened my Bible to-night my eye rested on this text:

> "'Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down with you having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.'—Rev. xii, 12.

"This is an accurate description of what is happening to-day in this frightful war, with its aeroplanes, submarines, poison gas, grave-digging bombs, and general massacre and mutilation. But are we sure that it is only for a short time? or that the devil was not among us before? No people have ever so far departed from the Spirit of Christ as the Germans of to-day, but we ourselves had been moving somewhat in the same direction.

"Before the war we had our Frightfulness.

"We observed tepid, passionless young people exercising fine intellects in a manner more impoverishing than enriching to their natures: artists indulging in meaningless portraiture of confused limbs; women

From my Diary, December 31st, 1914

qualifying for Political responsibility by blowing up gardens, burning down churches, and threatening the lives of innocent women and children in low letters—not only threatening—but attacking them with sticks, stones, axes and dog-whips. We saw old friends insulting and cutting each other over politics; great soldiers intriguing to put the Army against the Government; great lawyers defying the law; and, finally, pleasure people watching a man they loved drown, while incapable of either feeling or showing mourning for him.

"When we curse the 'Frightfulness' of the Germans we had better remember our own.

"War will ever be an enigma in my spiritual contemplation; but, if the same patience, self-surrender, devotion, fortitude, and faith could inspire men in life as in Death, there would be no more wars.

"The devil is undoubtedly among us to-day, and we must not infer that because God is good He is good-natured."

End of Diary quotation

CHAPTER IX

The Coalition

I CANNOT avoid writing, however perfunctorily, of some of the events which led not only to the resignation of my husband but to the downfall of a Party which had smashed the Unionists in 1906 by the biggest majority ever known, which had won three successive General Elections, and which had been led for a longer period than any in our political history by the same Prime Minister.

This is a matter of such delicacy that for obvious reasons I shall not always be able to give the names of those chiefly concerned, nor shall I deal in any great detail with the matter.

There is a common saying that public opinion is usually right, backed by the proverb, " There is no smoke without fire " ; but, judging by my own experience, I can only say I have found the reverse to be true : there is always a great deal of smoke and very little fire.

Since the days of Pilate, the populace shout for the wrong man and you need only observe the transitoriness of fashion or of fame to see how little public opinion is worthy of consideration.

It would almost seem as if there was a floating fabric of evil playing perpetually over crowds, instigating anonymous and threatening letters ; starting rumours ; casting doubts ; spreading what appeals to the lowest instincts of the credulous and ill-informed, and scattering from a busy mint false coins to the People and the Press.

I do not think there was any particular dislike for

Christ among the people who shouted "Give us Barabbas!" and some of them adored Him; but if you listen closely you will hear men and women joining each other all through life saying: "Give us Barabbas!" and you will be fortunate if you meet even a dozen people who hold and express an independent view. It suits the average human being to believe the worst, and thinking on things of good report gives them no sort of pleasure.

Bacon says:

"'Tis not the lie that passeth through the mind, but the lie that sinketh that doth the harm."

In times of great physical and moral strain, or intense mental excitement, trifles become portents.

In the year 1915 the recurring failures of our Offensive, and want of proper co-ordination in the General Staff, provoked adverse criticism of the conduct of the war. The silence so conspicuous in 1914 had disappeared, and the patience of the public was ebbing.

It was at this moment that the lie that sinketh was spread.

"Wait and see"—a phrase originally uttered as a threat by my husband in the House of Commons—was taken up by a group of influential newspapers, and quoted upon every occasion as meaning apathy and delay. It is not difficult to perceive the prejudice this created in the minds of men and women whose brothers, sons and lovers were being killed in a conflict that touched our shores; and it gave a great opening to self-seeking men who fancied that if they were in the position of Prime Minister things would be very different.

In years of War the Press if it desires to inflame the rabble-rousers has powers which it possesses at no other time, and, in criticising the patriotism, one must make allowances for the disappointment of Correspondents who were not only severely censored at home but were forbidden to go to the Front. The irritation this produced

was shown by a stream of abuse, and a deliberate desire to alarm the public at the expense of the Prime Minister.

It is an easy matter to frighten people. By gazing at a chimney pot you can collect a crowd in a street; by shouting "Fire!" you can kill people in a theatre; and if twenty or thirty papers write daily that the War Office is incompetent, the Foreign Office misled, and the Prime Minister asleep, they will be believed.

A certain air of authority was given to this abuse, as these papers having received private information of Cabinet decisions before the decisions could reach any of the Allies, were able to announce that they had forestalled the Prime Minister and to congratulate themselves on hastening up his "wait and see" methods. So persistently was this campaign pursued that several donkeys wrote signed letters to the *Times* praising it for its God-like prescience. I also had my social and political enemies, and will quote what I wrote in my diary at that time:

From my Diary, 1915

"The D——ss of W—— and others continue spreading amazing lies about me and mine: they would be grotesque if they were not so vile.

"Elizabeth is in turn engaged to a German Admiral or a German General; Henry has shares in Krupps; I 'feed Prussian prisoners with every dainty and comestible,' and play lawn tennis with them at Donnington Hall—a place whose very whereabouts is unknown to me.

"These private fabrications are not only circulated but believed, and, had it not been for my receiving £1,000 for a libel action which I took in the Law Courts against the Globe Newspaper, the whole of our thoughtful Press would have published them. As it is, they mutter incantations about the 'Hidden Hand,' 'Apathy in high places,' etc., and, like Pilate 'willing to content the people,' Barabbas is released.

"I am told by John Morley and other students of History that no greater campaign of calumny was ever

From my Diary, 1915

conducted against one man than that which has been, and is being, conducted against my husband to-day. When I point out with indignation that someone in the Cabinet is betraying secrets, I am counselled to keep calm. Henry is as indifferent to the Press as St. Paul's Cathedral is to midges, but I confess that I am not ! and I only hope the man responsible for giving information to Lord N—— will be heavily punished : God may forgive him ; I never can."

End of Diary quotation

As Lord Kitchener, Sir Edward Grey and my husband were the most powerful men in the Government, they were the chief victims of this abuse. Had they been as sensitive to the papers as Lord Rosebery, Lord Derby, or Lord Curzon, some effort might have been made to stop the divulgence of Cabinet secrets, but they were harassed with work, and only thinking of how to keep the Allies together and win the war.

We should never have been told to love our neighbours in the Bible had it not been a matter of difficulty : and, although it is probable that if we could have given more information and with greater rapidity of what was happening at the Front we should have satisfied people at home, it was impossible to let the public into our confidence when working with Allies as different from ourselves as the French, the Russians, and the Italians. Violent quarrels in what is called " the Silent Service," intrigue in the Army, and disloyalty at home, obliged us to form the Coalition of 1915.

Men's minds were distraught, their nerves shattered, and their hearts broken by the tragic events that were taking place close to our shores, rumours of which were received on the same day, and the patriotism and reserve shown at the outbreak of war were gradually evaporating.

A Coalition may suit other nations but it does not suit Great Britain. The Parliamentary groups which

govern France and other countries do not lend themselves to stability, and we have lived to see the failure of trying to govern men either by Autocracy or Bureaucracy. 10 Downing Street, 1915

In England we have evolved for ourselves from long political experience the system of Party Government by a corporate conscience which we not only understand but which has been the envy of the world. The esprit de corps which is essential in a Cabinet presents no attractions to a Coalition, and ours was conspicuously lacking in it.

Intrigue of every kind arose, due to the impatience of the frightened, the credulity of the fools, and the ambition of our friends.

Some men and women not only like but live upon Gossip. With a smile of welcome they proffer you one hand while concealing a stiletto in the other, and, without knowing it, the whole tenour of their talk is bearing false witness against their neighbours. These are they who sin against the Holy Ghost.

My husband, although an excellent judge of men and events, despised suspicion, and abhorred intrigue.

I read the following sentence somewhere :

" Suspicions are like bats amongst birds, they ever fly by twilight " ; and it was not until the 1st of July, 1915, that I realized there was a deliberate attempt being made by the Press and certain persons to entangle the Prime Minister in a mischievous personal controversy.

On the 1st of July, 1915, a friend of Mr. Lloyd George's and a Member of Parliament moved a resolution in the House that it would be expedient that all powers exercised by the Ordnance Department of the War Office—under the control of General von Donop—in respect of the supply of munitions of war should be transferred to the new Ministry of Munitions then under the command of Mr. Lloyd George.

In the course of a violent attack upon the Government he said that :

" By its scandalous neglect of the most elementary

considerations of warfare and its innumerable blunders it had seriously endangered the security of the country" ; and wound up a virulent speech with :

"The history of the Ordnance Department is failure in the past, chaos in the present and hopelessness for the future. We demand that the new Ministry should assume all the power of this Department in regard to the supply of munitions and that the Ordnance Department should be robbed of every vestige of its authority."

The *Times*, being the only paper to publish a verbatim report the next morning, must have been given that speech before it was delivered, and the author dined with Mr. Lloyd George on the night of the attack.

Private Members being commissioned to defame the Prime Minister, in conjunction with a group of hostile papers, was not only a new form of propaganda in our political history, but if sufficiently indulged in would bring all Parliamentary Government to an end.

July 5th, 1915

A few days later (on the 5th of July) Lord Haldane made a speech warmly defending General von Donop from the inaccurate and unjustifiable abuse which had been showered upon him. He observed that it is not in accordance with British ideas of fair play to attack a Civil Servant who from the nature of his position is unable to defend himself ; and pointed out that the Committee appointed as recently as October to look into the matter of shells had not only gone thoroughly into the matter, but included Mr. Lloyd George himself, and ended by saying :

"Had the order for shells then given by the Government been carried out, we should have had a very large surplus to-day."

This speech nettled the pioneers and was promptly answered. On the 8th, Mr. Lloyd George issued a statement to the papers in which he said :

"Lord Haldane's version of what took place some months ago at a Committee of the Cabinet on Arms is

incomplete and in some material respects inaccurate. At the proper time it will be necessary to go more fully into the matter, though Mr. Lloyd George hopes that he will not be driven to do so at this stage. But he would like to point out that the very fact of this conflict of memory having arisen shows the unwisdom of these partial and unauthorised disclosures of the decisions of highly confidential Committees of the Cabinet."

Here Mr. Lloyd George was right. Nothing of a confidential nature should ever be disclosed, either in public or in private, and whoever flattered the Press by giving away Cabinet Secrets at that time showed personal treachery of a kind fortunately rare in British politics; but he was wrong about Lord Haldane's memory.

I wrote to congratulate Haldane on his courage, and in his answer, which I received the same day (the 8th of July, 1915), he ended: July 8th, 1915

"So long as I have breath in my body officers who are misrepresented in public and are unable to defend themselves shall not be attacked with impunity."

On the 10th he came to see me and said:

"X—— and Co. are out to smash the Prime Minister, but Grey and I intend to stand on each side of him to protect him from such baseness."

A few days before this Lord French had sent a message to ask if he could see me. We had not met since the formation of the Coalition, and, as the whole cruel campaign about the shells had arisen from someone at his Headquarters falsifying the truth by supplying the Press with misleading information, I was not at all anxious to meet him; but it takes me longer than most people either to suspect or to drop old friends, so I gave way.

Confronted by my questions, Lord French blandly denied all knowledge of the shell affair, but he appeared dejected and confused, and after a painful interview we parted.

Haunted by his look of misery and knowing what he

must be suffering over the war, I wrote him a letter to wish him " God-speed," and this is his answer :

" Headquarters,
" British Army,
" France,
" *July* 13*th*, 1915.

" My dear Mrs. Asquith,

" I am sending one line by F. Guest to thank you for the very kind letter I got from you before I left England the other day. It was so nice and kind of you to let me see you, and I loved having a talk with you although you gave me a terrible ' Damning ! ' We were delighted to have the Prime Minister with us again. Please write me a line when you have time.

" Yours always sincerely,
" J. D. P. French."

This was followed up by several letters of such gratitude and affection to my husband and myself that, although I was puzzled, my suspicions were allayed.

It needs a mean nature to think of yourself when events of such tragic importance were taking place all over the world, and none of us were allowed to know at the time what Henry felt about the daily attacks upon himself. Through all those silent nights and waiting mornings, with the recurring news of failure, and the anxiety as to the fate of his own sons, he showed an evenness of mind and sweetness of nature rare even in the most courageous. (Lord Kitchener said in his farewell interview with the King : " I have never seen Asquith rattled : he is the best of the lot.")

My husband shook himself like a dog getting out of dirty water over the X—— episode, and the papers continued, adding to their personal abuse, glowing praises of Mr. Lloyd George. This was so noticeable that even the

Morning Post—a paper that has never concealed its loathing of the name of "Asquith," wrote in the last week of July, 1915: July, 1915

"There are certain political intrigues directed to the replacing of Mr. Asquith by some other politician, the origin and purpose of which are obscure; we will frankly confess that, while we are not numbered among the admirers of the Prime Minister, we would not think it any gain to see King Stork in the place of King Log."

In quoting this I do not mean to imply that Henry was popular with the Unionist Party, but—difficult as it is to believe to-day—nor was Mr. Lloyd George.

Col. Lockwood,* a genuine Conservative of the highest type, wrote in answer to a letter of mine:

> "Did I not tell you how all would some day recognise how great a man your P.M. was? While I listened to his speech in the House of Commons the other day I wondered if some saw the light at last.
>
> "Yours ever, dear kind friend,
>
> "MARK LOCKWOOD."

. . . . . .

The night before the first anniversary of the war—the 3rd of August, 1915—Lord Kitchener, Mr. Bonar Law, Mr. Winston Churchill, my sister Lucy and Lord D'Abernon dined with me: my husband and Elizabeth were to arrive the next day from the country. 10 Downing Street, August 3rd, 1915

Having heard of the death of Billy Grenfell,† I felt like cancelling all engagements, but fearing this would inconvenience my guests I went down to dinner with a heavy heart.

In less than six months Lord and Lady Desborough had lost their two sons; young men of 25 and 28, who combined all that life can give of courage, brains and good feeling, and I could hardly think of them without tears.

I would like to write of these and others that I loved

* Lord Lambourne. † The Hon. William Grenfell.

10 Downing Street August 3rd, 1915

who were killed in the war: Charles Lister, John Manners, Edward Horner, George Vernon, Eustace Crawley and Rupert Brooke, but the list of the dead that I cared for and the parents I mourned with would be too long to put in any single volume.

While discussing the Grenfell brothers with Lord Kitchener at dinner that night, I said with impulse that I thought faith should be rewarded in this world by more knowledge, and that I longed for one glimpse of God's purpose—if only a gleam of hope as to our sure immortality. The expression on Lord Kitchener's face was one of puzzled kindness, and he handed me the port. To hide my emotion he turned abruptly to the table and, changing the subject, said we had only ourselves to thank for the failures in the war.

"The Germans attack us and we wait to counter-attack them. This is madness" he said: "you must do it at once, while your enemy is exhausted, or, if you *can't*, you should reform your plans with deliberation and slowly; but to wait, and then counter-attack impulsively, is to court disaster."

Mr. Churchill asked him which he would rather have under his command, English, French or German troops: he said that after the English he thought the Germans were the best soldiers: Winston said he thought the French were superior; to this Lord Kitchener—who had fought in the Franco-Prussian War—demurred, but both he and the whole company were agreed that in attack the French Army had not a rival in the world.

We went on to discuss what form the Memorial Service for the anniversary of the war at St. Paul's Cathedral should take on the next day. Lord Kitchener said:

"The clergy are the most conservative, tiresome, unimaginative men to deal with that I have ever come across; I suggested all sorts of things to them: proper hymns like 'Eternal Father Strong to Save,' and 'Onward

Christian Soldiers,' but they would not listen to me: I want this service to be a great recruiting occasion. The Archbishop could, in a short sermon, stir up the whole congregation, which would be a far better way of doing things than all this intrigue about Conscription." 10 Downing Street, August 3rd, 1915

I was surprised to find that Lord Kitchener not only disliked intrigue but was averse to Conscription.

I am not going to write about the difficulties with the Colleagues and the Country over Conscription, but in this connection I would like to say that Mr. Walter Long,* although a strong Tory, showed us a loyalty all that time which neither my husband nor I will ever forget.

The next day (August 4th) my husband, my sister Lucy, my son Anthony and I went to St. Paul's Cathedral. In spite of soldiers, sailors, Ministers, Ambassadors, the crowd and the King, it was a disappointing service, and a great occasion missed. "Rock of Ages" was taken at different paces by the choir and the congregation, the prayers were long, and the music meagre. August 4th, 1915

My thoughts scattered as I listened to the sermon, and I wondered if the ways of man were not as mysterious as those of God.

We were watching little States bargaining over land and begging for money. Labour quarrels and employers' profits; an English-speaking nation "Too proud to fight"; and the only contribution of a great Church, the canonization of Charles the 1st—I thought of the Fighting and the Dead; of Julian and Billy Grenfell; of Lord Kitchener handing me the port; and came to the conclusion that, if it is hard to believe in God, it is no easier to believe in man.

. . . . . .

Before I left London for Scotland in the late autumn of 1915, and after a painful political Session, I received a charming letter, dated August 20th, 1915, from Mr. Bonar Law in answer to one from me in which I asked him

* Lord Long of Trowbridge.

August 4th, 1915

if nothing could be done to prevent Cabinet secrets being published in the Press, which I said was not only doing my husband and the Cabinet incalculable mischief, but hampering the conduct of the war.

"I am strongly of opinion," he wrote, "that the *Times* should not be allowed to go on day by day discrediting the Government in a way which most certainly is damaging the country in the prosecution of the war. There was an opportunity of raising the question in the Cabinet to-day and I pressed it as much as I could. It was decided that Carson and the Lord Chancellor should look into the question, and I hope that it will be dealt with."

The matter, however, never was dealt with.

CHAPTER X

My Children. Raymond Asquith's Death.

It is easier to talk than to write about one's children; but in finishing this autobiography I can hardly leave them out, and those who remember Mahomet's saying, "Paradise lies at the feet of Mothers," will forgive me if I make a digression here from war and politics to what is more intimate and personal.

I joined the children at North Berwick in the autumn of 1915, and one morning, while he was lying by my side, my little son revived our former discussion upon his future wife. He asked me which of the girls, or married women, that I knew, I would like him to have married. I answered I would prefer him to give me his own opinion, and that as long as she was not too pretty or too clever, but genuinely alive, good-humoured, courageous and kind, with a sense of duty and of honour, I should be satisfied; to which he replied:

"Well! mother! Elizabeth is the only person except yourself that this at all describes—of course, if I could marry a girl like her, I should be divinely happy, but perhaps she would not marry me!"

. . . . . .

Anthony was born in Cavendish Square on November the 9th, 1902, and was a fragile, delicate little creature. When I showed him to Elizabeth, who was six years old, after her first expression of delight and surprise, she bent her head and lowered her eyes, and I could see that she was jealous. I remember the occasion very clearly, because, fearing that I should not be strong enough to spend Christmas with the family at Easton Grey, and

hoping to remove the unfortunate impression that baby had created, I asked her to sing " While Shepherds watched their flocks " to me. When she had finished she said :

" I don't like ' the heavenly babe you there shall find to human view displayed, all meanly wrapped '—I'd like Him to be a tiny bit smarter and have a crib of His own, mother."

In discussing Christ together, I said that many of the great men that had lived before Him had said the same things, but none of them had told us to help the weak, or love our enemies. It was this that had startled and held mankind, as before His birth the cripples went to the wall, and Force governed the world. After a little reflection she said :

" I wish all the same that things were different, mother ; and that the world would go round the other way ! Then foxes would not eat rabbits, or water-rats eat hens ; and we should all have blue eyes and fair hair."

As baby was fair I hoped that this was a promising sign, but her jealousy of him till he went to school caused me much unhappiness. This was not the outcome of a small nature, but of her passionate love for me. I need not have worried, however, as the love Anthony and Elizabeth have for one another to-day is as great as the devotion I felt for my sister Laura.

My son Anthony, better known in the family as " Puffin," combines in nature and intellect the best qualities of an Asquith and a Tennant. Added to fine susceptibilities, he has good manners, reasoned judgments and a love of literature. He is a real artist with an enthusiasm for colour, rhythm and line, which was expressed at an early age both in his dancing and his music. Being delicate, my husband was not in favour of sending him away from us, but I thought the irregularity at home, due to his constant fatigue and uneven sleep, was worse for his health than the punctual monotony of a school.

ANTHONY AND ELIZABETH ASQUITH

We started his education early, under the guidance of a perfect governess, by name Anna Heinsius, and at the age of seven he had learnt French and German sufficiently well not to forget them, in spite of the carelessness with which foreign languages are treated at our public schools. Before he was nine he went to a day school in Sloane Street every morning, returning to Downing Street for lunch.

One day, when we were motoring home together, I observed a bleeding scar upon his knee. I dried it with my handkerchief and asked him how it had happened :

" A boy did it in a fight," he answered, " and he hurt my head by throwing a magnifying glass at me."

I examined his curls and found a long wound matted with blood and hair. I put my arm round him feeling I could have killed his assailant but said nothing.

" Mother," he asked after a pause, " if you saw two bigger boys fighting would you try and stop them ? "

" I hope so, darling," I answered.

" But, mother," he said tentatively, " if you knew it was no use and you would only get knocked about yourself ? "

" I would do it all the same," I said, " as you could never be quite sure it would be useless."

Turning to look at me, and a little hurt by my lack of sympathy, he said :

" But suppose I was thrown violently down and lamed for life ! "

At this I drew him closer to me and said I thought God would look after that.

A few days later when he told me he had won the prize for light-weight boxing I was surprised, and asked his master how it had come about.

" We do not give little boys a prize for their prowess, Mrs. Asquith," he said, " but for their grit. Anthony showed not only great courage but fine temper."

He was a delicate little boy when he left his day school, but nevertheless I decided I would continue his education, and my confidence in Dr. Williams and his wife determined me to send him to Summerfields, a decision that I have never regretted.

Both my children were fond of books, and, in looking through my diaries, I see that in December, 1904, Elizabeth chose the " Canterbury Tales " to read out loud to me, roaring with laughter over the merry friar Hubert, who " earned by begging more than his regular income, for he had such a pleasant way with him." Chaucer is never an easy writer to read whether to yourself or to anyone else, but though she was only seven she had advanced tastes in books.

Every child unless an invalid should be able to read at the age of five. I do not believe in reading out loud to children except very occasionally as I think it discourages them from reading by themselves, but it is an arguable point. Although it is certain that a wise mother should never forbid an undesirable book, it is equally true that she can guide the tastes of her children. There is time enough when you are young to justify delay in reading what is ugly, however brilliant, and books have an unconscious influence upon the character which Mr. Freud and others of the same mind do not say much about.

I took my little son to school in the Summer Term of 1912. Having built myself a house on the Thames to be near Oxford, I was able to go every Saturday afternoon and watch him racing about without a hat in the beautiful playing grounds of Summerfields. As he was forbidden by the doctors to go for the regular school walks, he and I spent most of our Sunday afternoons together, playing the piano, reciting verses or telling stories, and generally ended by saying our prayers in the garden before I motored back to join my guests at the Wharf.

On the 10th of June, 1916, we heard that Anthony had won the 3rd Winchester Scholarship, following in the

footsteps of Henry's two sons, Raymond and Cyril. In honour of this he spent Sunday with us at the Wharf and was allowed to dine downstairs.

After dinner Henry proposed "Puffin's health," which we all drank standing up. Flushed with pleasure and modest as a maid, he rose and thanked the company. Lord Morley, who was staying with us at the time, said to me when he sat down:

"How glad I am that you allowed me to be a witness of this pretty scene. You are a very lucky woman in your children and I really don't know which of them is the more remarkable. Clever men do not often have brilliant sons or daughters, and Asquith has broken every record."

He wrote me the following letter after leaving us on the Monday morning:

"FLOWERMEAD,
"*June 12th*, 1916.

"DEAR MRS. ASQUITH,

"I never had such a delightful visit. Your house is enchanting with all its new developments. The music was divine;* the talk was downright good. Everybody was pleased with everybody else; I, at any rate, felt the charm of my years of close association with the host and hostess.

"I shall not soon forget it all. And with affectionate sincerity and good wishes for the days to come, I am, always your friend,

JOHN MORLEY."

Dr. Alington,† who accompanied the Summerfield boys to Winchester for the examinations, told me that as Anthony was passing through the lounge of the hotel he read in a newspaper lying on the table that Lord Kitchener had been drowned; this threw him into a state of the

* Anthony played the piano to Lord Morley.
† Dr. Alington, the head master of Summerfields.

greatest perturbation, upon which his master with instantaneous resource warned him never to believe anything he saw in a newspaper. I shall always be grateful to Dr. Alington for the insight he showed upon this occasion, as I doubt if Anthony would have passed his examination if the shock of hearing of the death of such a friend had not been instantly removed from his mind.

In the last letter I had from Dr. Williams, dated Summerfields, November 14th, 1915, he wrote : " Anthony has the mind of the blessed Saints (' the spirit of the holy gods,' as in Daniel's case Nebuchadnezzar called it)."

I felt profoundly unhappy when I took Anthony to Winchester on the 20th of September, 1916. My summer Saturdays were at an end, nor could I reach him from the Wharf on Sundays. The Oxford road, instead of being a friendly " officier de liaison " between me and what I loved, would merely be a familiar mileage bereft of all interest, and, for aught I could tell, new and entertaining Winchester men might efface some of my influence with my little son.

I was unhappy also about the position of affairs in Downing Street, and in sharp disagreement with many of its inmates over Lord Kitchener's successor.

The deep personal sorrow of Raymond's death a few days before—to which I shall refer later—had taken my husband off his guard, and, had it not been for Elizabeth, I felt like hiring rooms near Winchester College to watch my boy and await events.

A few days later I received a letter from Winchester, in which Anthony wrote :

" In translating the following Latin passage I thought of you, mother.

" ' Apparet filios non tam in gremio educatos quam in sermone matris. Utinam in Tiberio Graccho Caioque Carbone tale ingenium ad rempublicam bene gerendam fuisset.'

MRS. ASQUITH AND HER SON ANTHONY

" It appears that her sons were educated not no much in the breast of their mother as in her advice (or conversation)."

When the time of his Confirmation was approaching I began to feel anxious ; and after some hesitation wrote to the second master.

I made a copy of my letter, a thing I seldom do, as I not only wanted to show it to my husband, but to keep it for reference. Before sending it I somewhat modified the original text. This is what I first wrote :

" *October 9th*, 1918.

" DEAR MR. WILLIAMS,

" I hear you are going to prepare my Anthony for his Confirmation, and as I think it an important time in a boy's life I take this opportunity of writing to you ; for although I shall be with him as often as I can at Winchester I may not be able to see you for long enough to discuss what I feel upon the matter.

" My sister Laura and I were by nature deeply religious, though I never remember anyone speaking to us on the subject except our eldest sister, Pauline Gordon Duff, and our cousin, John Tennant*—a man of saintly life and enthusiastic reverence ; but we talked to each other, and when I was thirteen I asked to be allowed to go with her to her Confirmation classes in London, where the fine teaching of the Rev. Capel Cure left an ineffaceable influence upon my mind and character.

" I have discussed every aspect of religion with Elizabeth and my little son from their earliest age, and it is because I wish you to know the form these discussions have taken that I write to you to-day.

" I want Anthony to meet life in the spirit of Christ, whose authority rested neither upon His knowledge,

* Mr. John Tennant, 19 The Boltens.

or His position, but upon the Love and Faith to which His life was dedicated. It is in this spirit that men should approach the pupils they are going to prepare for the Holy Communion, and it is for lack of it that parsons fail.

" Some of us are unlucky in our choice ; as many of the clergy are more at their ease with God than is convincing—a sign of moral vulgarity which I distrust in people and detest in priests. Familiarity breeds as much contempt in Religion as it does in Society.

" I would like Anthony to read his Bible. My husband knows his Bible and Shakespeare as intimately as the classics, and, though I prefer such Greek literature as I know—through Professor Gilbert Murray's translations—to Hebrew, there is nothing that I have read in matters of advice comparable to the sayings and teachings of Christ.

" I believe you might as well go out hunting in an omnibus as try to find what I value in religion through the intellect. It is here I think that what is called ' preparation ' goes wrong.

" Men are made up of so many different parts ; temperament, character, nature and brains, but all these, whether developed through knowledge, conduct or emotion, should be the servants and not the masters of the soul.

" It is a hard matter for this view to meet with the agreement of men of intellect, but it would be easier if it could be shown in preparation to be a soaring rather than a subjugation of the mind.

" The spirit of man is an inward flame ; a lamp the world blows upon, but never puts out, and this is what I want you to teach my son. If the clerical guides to Christ would emphasize the development rather than the destination of the soul, and avoid the Heaven and Hell part of their teaching, I cannot but think they would achieve their purpose.

"I would like Anthony to feel the significance of Compassion as compared with Pity. I would like him to be fundamentally humble and tender, without which we cannot hope to help one another; and I want him to have no intellectual arrogance, or that fatiguing dialectical skill that scores; but a desire to search for and to find the Truth.

"I would like him to have no blindness of heart, and perfect moral manners as well as moral courage. Most of the earlier virtues which I care about have passed out of fashion. Consideration for the old, and discipline for the young, and, although the fear of God has disappeared, it has taken with it both Awe and Mystery.

"I want my son to keep his Saturdays as well as his Sundays; to protect people's failings instead of making copy out of them, and to spread what is of good report. I want him not to laugh at other people's Gods, and never to be afraid of saying what is right, even if it is, or even if it is not, an epigram.

"Thanking you for all you do for him,

"I am always,

"Yours in sincerity,

"MARGOT ASQUITH."

My son is not spoilt, and, if he keeps his health, should, I think, go far in life. The Headmaster of Winchester, in thanking me for a letter I wrote to him, after hearing who had won the Balliol Scholarships, wrote to me:

"I do indeed value your assurance that you are grateful for my charge of Anthony. It is a heavy responsibility, to put it in a negative way, not to dim the brightness of young and rare spirits like his, or of the great literature which he loves. Yes, he is indeed a rare spirit. I look forward eagerly and wistfully to find his proper niche."

From my Diary

On receiving this letter I wrote in my diary :

" I too am wondering what my son's proper niche will be.

" When I realised as early as the spring of 1916 that Henry was not working with gentlemen on whom I could build an absolute trust—to misquote Macbeth—I wrote in this book :

" ' He hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
So clear in his great Office, that his virtues
Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued against
The deep damnation of his taking off.'

" And I can only hope that my son will inherit from his father as great an Office as he has inherited his rare nature."

End of Diary quotation

10 Downing Street, July, 1916

After this digression I return to the summer of 1916. On the 5th of July, I received a letter from Raymond Asquith,* written from outside the Ypres salient, that curious strategic position that—whether from British obstinacy or foreign pressure I do not know—our Army occupied at such tragic cost and for so long a time :

" *July 5th*, 1916.

" DEAREST MARGOT,

" I was delighted to get your excellent letter with its capital news that Puff has got his scholarship ; he will enjoy Winchester much more than Summerfields. What you say of the snobbery of some soldiers is appallingly true ! If you look at any list of honours, it's always the same story. The Dukes are proved to be the bravest men of all, and after them the Marquesses. We've been having stirring times these last months. We were rushed up in motor-buses in the

* Raymond Asquith, 3rd Grenadier Guards.

MR. ASQUITH AND HIS SON ANTHONY AT 'THE WHARF'

middle of our rest as an emergency measure to relieve the Canadians after their counter-attack at Hooge. We took over what was in effect a battle-field and an untidy one at that. Mined trenches, confluent craters, bodies and bits of bodies, woods turned into a wilderness of stubby blackened stumps and a stink of death and corruption which was supernaturally beastly. The Canadians fought extremely well and are brave and enterprising, but they are deficient in system and routine. No troops can be first rate unless they are punished for small faults and get their meals with regularity. The Canadians are frequently famished and never rebuked, whereas the Brigade of Guards are gorged and d——d the whole time. We stayed among the smells for a week.

10 Downing Street, July 5th, 1916

" I had a narrow escape one night. I had taken a man with me to inspect the barbed wire in front of our trench and when we were 40 yards out we found ourselves suddenly illuminated by the glare of ½ dozen German rockets. We bobbed down behind a lump of earth and the next moment a bomb burst a yard away ; I was spattered all over but not hurt.

" We have 10 more days to get through these two lines before we can change our linen or take our boots off ; sixteen days without undressing is excessive in my opinion, but I suppose P—— S—— knows best.

" Love to you and Father."

This was the last letter I ever had from him.

When the Parliament of 1916 broke up in summer, we went to a house at Bognor lent us for six weeks by a new and dear friend of ours, Sir Arthur Du Cros.

We had invited a mixed party for our last week-end ; Lord Reading, Sir Ernest Cassel, his niece, Anna Jenkins, Lord Charles Montagu, Lord Basil Blackwood, Sir Arthur Du Cros, my cousin Nan Tennant, and Mr. Massingham

10 Downing Street, July, 1916

of *The Nation*; but some of them threw us over, and, as far as I can remember, Sir Ernest Cassel, his niece (my friend, Anna Jenkins) and Lord Reading, were our only guests.

Sir Ernest Cassel was a man of natural authority, who from humble beginnings became a financier of wealth and importance. He had no small talk and disliked gossip; he was dignified, autocratic and wise; with a power of loving those he cared for which I find rare. In spite of the sufferings that our contemptible spy-hunters caused him during the War, no one was ever more loyal or generous to the country of his adoption.

He and I had many mutual friends, among them the present Viceroy of India.

Rufus Reading is one of the best fellows that ever lived. He has no trace of hardness, and though intensely ambitious is never selfish. By race a Jew, he is British to the core, neither touchy, restless nor suspicious, but combines wisdom with caution and has the laugh of an English schoolboy. What attracts me in him is his untirable capacity for simple enjoyment, his gravity and insight, and a critical faculty that never cuts. Although an admiring friend of the present Prime Minister, he has always been grateful for the affection and friendship my husband showed him over the Marconi incident, nor has he ever neglected to prove this gratitude. He has consulted Henry throughout his career and their friendship cannot lessen now.

After leaving Bognor we returned to the Wharf for the remainder of the holidays.

I will here quote from my diary.

From my Diary, The Wharf, September, 1916

"On Sunday, September the 17th, we were entertaining a week-end party, which included General and Florry Bridges, Lady Tree, Nan Tennant, Bogie Harris, Arnold Ward, and Sir John Cowans. While we were playing tennis in the afternoon my husband went for a

To Margot
from her devoted friend
Ellen Terry
Reading

drive with my cousin, Nan Tennant. He looked well, and had been delighted with his visit to the front and all he saw of the improvement in our organisation there: the tanks and the troops as well as the guns. Our Offensive for the time being was going amazingly well. The French were fighting magnificently, the House of Commons was shut, the Cabinet more united, and from what we heard on good authority the Germans more discouraged. Henry told us about Raymond, whom he had seen as recently as the 6th at Tricourt.

From my Diary, The Wharf, September, 1916

" As it was my little son's last Sunday before going back to Winchester I told him he might run across from the Barn in his pyjamas after dinner and sit with us while the men were in the dining-room.

" While we were playing games Clouder, our servant —of whom Elizabeth said, ' He makes perfect ladies of us all '—came in to say that I was wanted.

" I left the room, and the moment I took up the telephone I said to myself, ' Raymond is killed.'

" With the receiver in my hand, I asked what it was, and if the news was bad.

" Our secretary, Davies, answered, ' Terrible, terrible news. Raymond was shot dead on the 15th. Haig writes full of sympathy, but no details. The Guards were in and he was shot leading his men the moment he had gone over the parapet.'

" I put back the receiver and sat down. I heard Elizabeth's delicious laugh, and a hum of talk and smell of cigars came down the passage from the dining-room.

" I went back into the sitting-room.

" ' Raymond is dead,' I said, ' he was shot leading his men over the top on Friday.'

" Puffin got up from his game and hanging his head took my hand; Elizabeth burst into tears, for though she had not seen Raymond since her return from Munich she was devoted to him. Maud Tree and Florry Bridges suggested I should put off telling Henry the terrible news

From my Diary, The Wharf, September 17th, 1916

as he was happy. I walked away with the two children and rang the bell :

" ' Tell the Prime Minister to come and speak to me,' I said to the servant.

" Leaving the children, I paused at the end of the dining-room passage ; Henry opened the door and we stood facing each other. He saw my thin wet face, and while he put his arm round me I said :

" ' Terrible, terrible news.'

" At this he stopped me and said :

" ' I know. . . . I've known it. . . . Raymond is dead.'

" He put his hands over his face and we walked into an empty room and sat down in silence."

End of Diary quotation

MRS. ASQUITH AND HER GRANDBABY, PRISCILLA BIBESCO

CHAPTER XI

Mr. Asquith's Resignation.

I HAVE outlined the beginning of the intrigue which led to my husband's resignation; but although I have kept a careful and precise record of all that happened in the last months and weeks of the year 1916 it is not my purpose to quote the conversations or correspondence either public or private that led up to the final event. Had it not been that we are threatened with the publication of several memoirs upon the subject I would not have referred to it at all. The anonymous volumes which have already appeared are negligible; as it is safe to assume, when an author is ashamed to reveal his name, the book is written either by a servant, a self-starter, or by prejudiced and confused eavesdroppers.

10 Downing Street, December 1916

After Lord Kitchener's death in June a reconstruction of the Cabinet became inevitable, and when I heard who had succeeded him at the War Office I wrote in my Diary:

"We are out: it can only be a question of time now when we shall have to leave Downing Street."

My opinion was shared by none of Henry's secretaries, and some of his family abjured me for them.

The trackless progress of intrigue interests people of different characters in varying degrees. To men like my husband, Lord Grey, Lord Buckmaster, or Lord Crewe, no one but the boldest or silliest would mention the subject, and the confidential few to whom I spoke met my fears with surprise tempered by disagreement. I felt a

sense of acute isolation in those last months in Downing Street, while I observed what was going on as clearly as you see fish in a bowl.

In a book, entitled "The Pomp of Power," which I have just received, I find a wholly erroneous account of what occurred in December, 1916. On page 155, I read:

10 Downing Street, December, 3rd, 1916

"Asquith came back on Sunday; and that afternoon the Unionist members of the Government wrote him that they resigned if Lloyd George did. In fact, they did send in their resignations, but withdrew them when Asquith replied that the matter raised by Lloyd George was not settled."

None of Mr. Asquith's colleagues resigned; nor did a single member of them write to him. No one was more surprised than his Unionist colleagues when they were summoned to a meeting suddenly and unexpectedly called on Sunday, the 3rd of December—to which Lord Lansdowne was not invited. We were subsequently told that the written decision taken at that meeting was torn up on its way to 10 Downing Street, and all that we received was a verbal message to the effect that some of the colleagues wished the Prime Minister to resign.

Given sufficient reason you will always find a high standard of honour among certain kinds of thieves, and personal ambition—after Love—is the strongest motive in life.

To bring off a big thing with success, you must not only be highly prepared and choose your moment, but you must be certain of your men, and nothing interested me more in those Autumn manœuvres than speculating upon the rewards promised, and the motives that moved the men who were engaged upon them.

To-day I can write with calm of these events, but at the time of their occurrence I was shocked and wounded by the meanness, ingratitude and lack of loyalty shown to a man who in all the years he had been Prime Minister had disproved these qualities in a high degree.

Mr. Lloyd George could never have formed his Govern-

ment in the December of 1916, had Mr. Balfour or the Labour leaders refused to join it. It is at least probable that neither Lord Curzon, Lord Robert Cecil, Mr. Walter Long nor Mr. Austen Chamberlain would have served under the present Prime Minister if their old chief had stood out at that moment, and I doubt if Mr. Bonar Law or Lord Carson, even with the assistance of a large body of the Press, could have succeeded in the task. 10 Downing Street, December 3rd, 1916

To transfer the allegiance of the majority of the Parliamentary Labour Party from one combination to another was easier of achievement after the promises made than I had supposed, and Mr. Balfour acquiesced. After this defection it would have been difficult, if not impossible, for my husband to carry on the Government.

The situation of our soldiers fighting abroad was too anxious to contemplate fighting for himself at home, and on the 5th, after consultation with other colleagues, he sent in his resignation to the King.

To a man of Henry's type, the knowledge of what others were suffering would always preclude him from thinking of himself, nor is it a topic he can ever be accused of dwelling upon. It is certain that one Prime Minister could not have retained office throughout the whole period of the War, and, as long as a war is won, it matters little to the right sort of Commander who claims the credit for it.

My husband fell on the battle-field surrounded by civilians and soldiers whom he had fought for, and saved; some of whom owed him not only their reputations and careers, but their very existence. Only a handful of faithful men remained by his side to see whether he was killed or wounded, and on the 7th of December Mr. Lloyd George became Prime Minister.

Among the many amusing and pathetic letters we received at that time, was the following, from one of our Junior Liberal Whips. It was dated December 8th, 1916; and ended:

10 Downing Street, December 8th, 1916

"I am going to continue to work in the little post to which you so kindly appointed me in 1915. Mr. George has expressed the wish that I and others should carry on.

"You are my Party Leader, and I believe and hope that we shall have the honour of again serving under your supreme command. I feel rather like Judas Iscariot must have done."

Two days after this we went to Walmer Castle, where my husband was taken ill, and he never returned to Downing Street.

. . . . . .

While watching the ships out of the windows at Walmer Castle on the evening of the 12th of December, a servant told me that I was wanted on the telephone to speak to someone at the War Office. I took up the receiver and listened to the following:

"Take a pencil, and write this for our dear Prime Minister: 'Germany together with her Allies conscious of her responsibility before God, their own nation and humanity, have proposed this morning to the hostile Powers peace negotiations.'"

Walmer Castle, December 12th, 1916

I recognised the voice of our friend, Evelyn Fitzgerald. He ended by saying:

"Tell our beloved Prime Minister that Jack Cowans wished him to know this; we are all thinking of him at the War Office, I can tell you! I can't bear to hear he is ill. Give him our love, please."

I got up and walked down the passage to Henry's room.

As the doctor had warned me that he was not to be bothered by letters or conversation, I hesitated after opening his door:

"Come in," he said, "you don't disturb me."

I found him lying in bed wide-awake, and his room was dark.

I went to the window and read out loud the first German Peace Proposal. Walmer Castle, December 12th, 1916

When I had finished, he sat up and said :

" How I wish I could believe that someone would have the wits to keep this door ajar."

. . . . . .

After the amazing fables purposely spread and foolishly believed, that my husband's conduct of the first two years of war was too slack ever to win it, it is instructive to remember that it was under his Administration that the Germans first prayed for Peace. General Ludendorff confesses that by December, 1916, the Germans had lost the war.

In Volume I of his War Memoirs he writes of the situation at the end of 1916 :

" We could not contemplate an offensive ourselves, having to keep our reserves available for defence. There was no hope of a collapse of any of the Entente Powers. If the war lasted, our defeat seemed inevitable. Economically we were in a highly unfavourable position for a war of exhaustion. At home our strength was badly shaken. Questions of the supply of food-stuffs caused great anxiety, and so, too, did questions of '*moral*.' We were not undermining the spirits of the enemy populations with starvation, blockades and propaganda. The future looked dark, and our only comfort was to be found in defying a superior enemy and that our line was everywhere beyond our frontiers." Quoted from Vol. I of General Ludendorff's War Memoirs

CHAPTER XII

An Episode, 1917

It might have been thought that War, with its weeping nights and solitary mornings, would have silenced rumour ; that the fearing and faint at home would have been infected by the radiant and courageous abroad, and that such unknown human sufferings as the world went through in 1914 would have made men kind ; but it was not so.

From the first day the cry went up that we were to " hunt out the Germans in our midst," and you had only to suggest that the person you disliked for reasons either social or political had German blood or German sympathies and a witch-hunt was started as cruel and persistent as any in the 14th century.

Our treatment of aliens was worse than that of any of the Allies. We crushed their business, ruined their homes, boycotted their families and drove their wives into asylums. Not a voice was raised from Christian pulpits ; but Prelates were photographed on gun-carriages chatting to soldiers on the glories of battle.

Whatever other wars accomplished for other people, ours did not make us good.

A minor Minister was hounded out of public life because his wife had gone to see the soldier son of an old German friend of hers, who was imprisoned here; an action which stirred Mayfair to its foundations.

There are many fine texts on the subjects, but no sermon was preached upon them.

In chapter 25th of St. Matthew it says :

" For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat : I was thirsty and ye gave me drink ; I was a stranger, and ye took me in :

" Naked, and ye clothed me ; I was sick, and ye visited me ; I was in prison, and ye came unto me . . .

" Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

While the New Testament was forgotten, the newspapers were devoured, and women collected round tea-tables, crying out against the Minister's wife with as much vigour as the Jews shouted for Barabbas. I hardly knew the guilty lady by sight, but was taken on about the affair one afternoon at a fashionable tea-party.

First Lady (challenging me on my entrance into the room) : " Well, Margot. I suppose you've heard of this disgraceful affair ? "

" What affair ? " said I.

Second Lady : " Mrs. L—— H——, whose husband is in our Foreign Office, has been to see a Hun soldier in prison ! "

I replied : " Really ! Did she go to see him regularly ? "

Same Lady : " Oh, I don't say that ! but quite often enough ! Someone told me she went three times last year."

" Was he a friend of hers ? " I asked.

Third Lady (in horror-stricken voice) : " Why, most certainly he was ! Not only the boy, but I believe his mother also. Can you imagine any woman being a friend of a German ? Or going to see the brutes ! It's really too disgusting ! While all our poor boys are being slaughtered."

Fourth Lady : " It makes one's blood boil ! What I say is, our sons will have died in vain if we ever forgive or befriend a Hun again."

There was a pause after this, broken by the first lady :

" Well, Margot, you say nothing ; I strongly suspect you think she was right ! "

" Not at all ! " I answered. " She was quite wrong ; I think Mrs. L—— H—— ought to have gone far oftener to the prison. It was the least she could have done if she was a friend of the boy's mother."

. . . . .

One day in 1916 while I was serving tea to wounded Tommies at a party given by Lady Garvagh, which I did once a week, my hostess—the kindest of women—irrelevantly introduced me at one of the long tables. She said to the soldiers, stretching her arm in a gesture of welcome over the hot-water urn :

" I am sure you will be glad to meet Mrs. Asquith—the wife of our Prime Minister you know—who has so kindly come . . ."

At this I stopped her, and said to the men :

" I think it very kind of you to let me come here and give you tea at this concert. I can't sing, or act, or do anything amusing, and I'm sure someone else ought to have been in my place to-day."

A typical West End lady at my elbow—also pouring out tea—interrupted me with emphasis ; and looking at the soldiers said :

" I am sure we are all glad to meet Mrs. Asquith ; it will give you an opportunity of telling her how you British soldiers were treated in the German camps and prisons ; *very* different from the way we treat the German prisoners here ! ! "

Suspecting nothing, and full of sympathy, I said :

" Ah ! yes, from what I hear you have all suffered Hell ! What terrible people the Germans seem to have become ! I can hardly bear to think of their cruelty ! "

I had scarcely finished my sentence when I saw the

lady's eye gleam, and in an acid voice she said to a charming-looking Tommy, upon whom I was waiting :

" Yes, indeed ! All of you were as ill-treated in Germany as their prisoners are pampered here. Perhaps Mrs. Asquith should be informed a little about Donnington Hall."

I suddenly recognised the *John Bull* touch, and was reinforced in my conviction by the look of acute observation on the face of the soldier ; I said rather coldly to her :

" You may be right, but how do you know ? I have never visited a German soldier in my life, nor seen Donnington Hall ; I don't even know where it is."

The Tommy, instinctively feeling by my voice that the temperature was rising, looked at the lady quietly :

" Would you have us treat the German prisoners like they treated us, miss ? " he said. " *I* think your prisoner is your guest."

The lady, drawing her head up like a goose on a green, walked majestically away.

. . . . . .

No one who had either lover, brother, son or husband in the trenches can have any idea of the agony of the early years of the war ; and when a lady of foreign birth, too flippant to feel, and too noisy to pray, posed before the public, and pandered to the Press by saying on a platform that she had constantly been to 10 Downing Street on matters of vital importance during the war, and had felt horrified at the indifference exhibited by the Asquiths, she was not merely improvising, but displaying the kind of cruelty which is the exclusive property of women. No man would have said that of a family who had had one son killed, another shell-shocked, and the third maimed for life.

Alfred de Musset writes :

" Quoi ! tu n'as pas d'etoile et tu vas sur la mer !
Au combat sans Musique, au voyage sans livre !
Quoi ! tu n'as pas d'amour et tu parles de vivre ! "

. . . . . .

One day, late in the autumn of 1917, I was travelling from Wiltshire to London. It was a hot afternoon and I was alone. At the first stop a lady got into my carriage. She had that touch of blue serge and buoyant eye that suggests a week-end on the river; a white hat, a fair complexion and not a pucker in her confident countenance.

She had pearls round her neck, and wore the whitest of white shoes and fine silk stockings. She began to poke about first in the pockets of her serge jacket, and then in her jewelled hand-bag, and when she shook her skirt her bag fell to the ground. She was so pretty and alert that I felt it was almost rude not to speak to her.

"Have you lost your ticket?" I said, picking up her bag.

"Why no!" she answered. "You're very kind, but I've lost the address of a Belgium shop where you can buy everything—but I can get it again" (with a reassuring smile). "These poor people! and all the atrocities, you know! It makes one want to do everything one can for them. I don't know if you are like me, but I get so weary of the Flags and the Pearls and the Dolls and the Days! In fact, I just hate these screams in charities."

"That's true!" I said, "but you have no idea what an amazing amount of money Flag-days bring in. The results are really compensating."

THE LADY (cheerfully): "The egg collections at Reading Station would try you if you spent as much time on this line as I do!"

To which I answered feebly:

"You like the country, do you? . . ."

THE LADY: "*This* country? Why, I'm crazy about it. I've got a little house way down on the river, the cunningest thing you ever saw! and I spend all my time going backwards and forwards in the train to it."

"You don't look as if it tired you," I said, adding: "I spend my Sundays in the country too, but I can't say they rest me much."

THE LADY (in excited agreement): "Why, that's so?" and observing the coral tip of my parasol, she exclaimed:

"Oh! how cute! You are like me then, always going out of town; but alas! my holiday is over and I've got to work like mad now!"

I looked at her and asked tentatively if it was some kind of war work that she was doing. Seeing a wide smile of rippling teeth, I hastily said:

"I mean most people are *starting* their holidays in August." Not wishing to appear curious, I added casually: "But who can talk of holidays now?" to which she answered:

"I am afraid I do no war work; I am going to London to rehearse a new play."

"Oh! how delightful!" I exclaimed. "You act, do you? I have often longed to be an actress."

THE LADY: "I'm very anxious about this piece—you see it's the first time I've ever played in England."

"You are an American?" said I.

THE LADY: "Why yes! Didn't you guess it by my accent?"

"I might have guessed it by your clothes," I said, "but you don't speak with much accent!" Feeling this was a clumsy thing to say, I added quickly, "I expect you find *my* accent odd!"

THE LADY (discerning in me a certain embarrassment): "I was just thinking you've got such a beautiful-speaking voice you should have been an actress yourself."

Flattered and amused, I said to her:

"Is this the first time you've been to England?"

To which she replied:

"It *is*: and I find you all *very* interesting! But how strange you are in some ways!"

"Do tell me, in what way are we strange?" I asked encouragingly.

THE LADY: "Your men are so strange, and your politics."

At this I said :

" To an outsider *your* politics seem strange. I do not mean because you come into the war late ; nor am I saying your President or your politics are either better or worse than ours, but what in your country you call Democracy we over here would call the greatest Autocracy the world has ever known."

Seeing that these words conveyed nothing to her, and wanting to get back on to her own subject, I said :

" But politics are not what you are interested in, *I'm* sure ! "

" Why, yes ! " she answered : " that is just what I *am* interested in ; and the strangest thing I've seen in your country is your politics and your politicians. Even this new Government seems all at sixes and sevens ; and in the last the Cabinet was so big that I'm told some of them didn't even know what the others were doing. The Lord Chamberlain told a man, who told a friend of mine, that he had never seen the Prime Minister ; and half the Cabinet Ministers did not know Hog or Barn—or whatever the Labour man is called—by sight ! But then, Asquith !——"

I tried to interrupt her by putting up the window, but in vain.

" Asquith they say has got the biggest brain in Europe."

Relieved but anxious I tried again :

" Tell me who are the big brains in Europe ? I feel curious to know who you will say." But the lady rode fearlessly on, being well in her stride.

" I am told by people who are up in things that Asquith has made a fortune in Krupps, and that his daughter Elizabeth is engaged to be married to a German Admiral."

I gazed at her with the interest of an explorer who has suddenly come upon what he has heard about but never met. Was it possible that this pretty creature was going to quote the low letters that are manufactured daily for

Downing Street, and are sent with equal monotony to Ambassadors, Ministers and Kings?

"Dear me!" said I. "How amazing! I never heard that Asquith, as you call him, was a rich man before."

THE LADY: "Oh! believe me, he's *enormously rich;* and his sympathies are entirely with the Germans—it seems *so* sad! But then, most people know it's not him at all, but his wife: her influence has ruined his career! She must be a *terrible* woman!"

"Do you know either of the Asquiths?" I said firmly; "because if you don't . . ."

The lady interrupted me:

"Why, everyone knows Mrs. Asquith! and she is so *ugly!*"

I smiled, and said: "In your country, I suppose, *this* would be considered an achievement; here, it is looked upon as a misfortune! Poor Mrs. Asquith may be very well-known! but I don't fancy *you* know much about her!"

THE LADY: "Personally, *no;* and I am glad I don't: I would not like to shake hands with her, or even be in the same room with such a woman! In all America I don't believe you'd find anyone like that! And they say she is so callous she does not feel the war at all."

"Before you go any further," I said, "do tell me, are you *serious?* Do you *really* believe this rot and rubbish? How can you be such a fool?"

THE LADY: "But where have you lived? It's common knowledge that she's hard and artificial, and so clever that she can get anyone to do her dirty work for her. Why I should shudder if I came into contact with a woman like that."

At this moment a young officer got into our carriage, and, apologizing, saluted as he stumbled over my writing-case. I put my finger to my lips at the lady when he turned his back to us, placing his kit in the rack, and she relapsed into an excited silence.

Before arriving at Paddington I said to her:

"Can I be of any use in giving you a lift? My odd man will be at the station with a taxi to meet me."

THE LADY (pulling up long gloves and glowing with gratitude): "Why, that's real kind! How *perfectly lovely* you are."

We got out of the train and stood upon the platform; my servant told us to wait till he could bring the taxi up to us.

THE LADY (putting her wrist-watch to the station time): "Why, I declare, thanks to you, I shall be all right for my rehearsal; I should have got into an awful mess but for you."

Then with a sudden impulse, placing her gloved hand upon mine, she said deliberately and with emphasis:

"You know you are a *very wonderful person!*"

I stood quite still, and looking at her said:

"Then I am not such a *terrible* woman after all?"

Fascinated as a duck by a snake she moved slowly towards me on the pavement gazing in my face with glued eyes.

"God! Honey!" said she. "You're not . . ."

"Yes; I am Mrs. Asquith! Get into the taxi."

She stumbled in and I told the man to drive to 20 Cavendish Square. Seizing me by the arm as we sat down she said:

"Why! What *have* I said! Oh Heavens! What *have* I said?"

"You praised my husband," I answered; "your friends think him clever, but the Krupps firm have made him a rich man and you do not like this; his sympathies are entirely with the Germans; giving his nights, and his days, and his sons to the war, and persuading his fellow-countrymen all over the world to do the same in speeches which I fear you have not read, was mere 'camouflage,' he was all the time at the end of a wire making money out of corpses."

THE LADY (interrupting and putting her hands to her ears): "Oh! don't! *don't! stop! do* please *STOP!*"

"You said in all America there was not a woman as bad or as heartless as Mrs. Asquith," I continued, "and you asked me where I had lived that it was possible to know as little about her as I did; that *all* your friends knew her, though you were glad you did not, as she does not feel the war, and that you could not possibly touch the hand of such a woman."

Seeing her look of misery, I added:

"Pray do not fret! I am profoundly indifferent to what the Public or the Press think about me, for that has really no importance; but when it comes to my husband . . ."

"Oh! but it *does* matter what they say about you!—Your husband has lots of admirers and he can defend himself; my friends tell me everyone trusts him——"

At this point I interrupted her.

"Trusts a man who has shares in German shells? You have strange friends!"

"Well," she replied, "if everyone does not, at least more do than don't! But to think such awful things should be said about a woman like you is horrible! You should really contradict them publicly."

I looked at her:

"Would you have me say in Trafalgar Square that a man who has been Prime Minister of England for nearly ten years is not likely to be a knave or a fool? Would you have me go round the streets with a bell, crying: 'Mrs. Asquith is not a German spy; Miss Asquith is not engaged to a German Admiral; Mrs. Asquith does not know where Donnington Hall is; Mr. Asquith's sympathies are with *our* soldiers and not with those that have killed his son'?"

"Why no!" she said; "but surely there must be some way of preventing people from saying such awful things about you. Have you no way of defending yourself?"

" No," I said. " Neither I nor anyone else can defend themselves against the cruel or the idle. After all, if you, who seem to be kindly and intelligent, repeated and believed all this about me, why should not other people ? Even your friends who know me so well told you this, and until two hours ago you believed them ; why don't you believe them now ? Are you *sure* I did not spend my days playing tennis with German prisoners or providing them with turtle and truffles ? Or that my daughter Elizabeth did not betray the movement of our Fleet to her German fiancé ? How do you know that my husband and I feel this war, or indeed feel anything at all ? Why should such a ridiculously short acquaintance rob you of your faith ? "

Seeing her face pale with emotion, I relented and said :

" Perhaps you were exaggerating what your friends told you about me."

To which she replied energetically :

" Why, not at all ! I assure you ; I *cursed* that young officer when he came into our carriage, as I knew our lovely talk would be at an end, but now I bless him, for had it not been for him I would have told you much worse things."

Amused by her candour, I said :

" What worse or more unforgivable thing can anyone say of a fellow-being than that she does not feel this war ? If all my enemies conspired together to defame me, they could invent nothing that I should feel as poignantly as that."

Our taxi had stopped at my house in Cavendish Square and she pleaded with me to let her come in.

" Tell me, do you hate me ? Do you think me awful ? Oh, let me come in if only for a moment."

" But," I said, " you will be late for your rehearsal."

" Oh ! that can go hang ! I see you don't really want me——"

Observing a look of discouragement on her face, I said :

" All right, come in and I will give you tea."

We walked into the cool, front hall, and she stood looking at the mahogany doors and painted staircase.

" And so you really *are* Mrs. Asquith ! and you live in this beautiful house. Dear me ! " she said, looking earnestly at me, " and I thought you would be homely and overwhelming."

" Don't worry," said I, " you are perfectly right ; I am both."

We walked into the green boudoir. She looked through the windows at the gravel yard, the flowering rhododendrons and the turning leaves of the vine, and then moved towards my book-shelves. She was restless and could not make up her mind to sit down. I poured out the tea, and my secretary and friend, Miss Way, brought me my letters.

I observed on the first envelope, written in large blue pencil :

" *Forwarded—Mrs. Asquith*—10 *Downing Street. Name unknown.*"

This little pleasantry had been going on for months, and thinking it might amuse her I held the envelope up in front of her, saying :

" You see, in spite of my being so well-known, the Prime Minister's secretaries have never even heard of me."

At that moment the front-door bell rang and I heard my husband's voice talking to our butler, Clouder—a man of genius—and giving orders to our chauffeur, Horwood ; I turned to my companion and said :

" My husband has arrived and I will introduce you to him if you like, but I am afraid I do not know your name."

" My name is I—— A—— " she said, " and oh ! how I wish that I had known yours."

After my introduction, Miss I—— A—— was too excited to sit down, but stood chatting to Henry. They exchanged a few commonplaces and she admired the green silk of my boudoir walls. He pointed to the coloured print of the Marquis of Wellington and asked her if she had ever seen a picture of the Iron Duke at that stage in his career. They looked at the books and mezzotints and we walked in silence into the front hall.

I said good-bye to her and she whispered fervently in my ear as she kissed me :

" Thank you for forgiving me—and you must never forget that there is nothing in the whole world I would not do for you."

CHAPTER XIII

The Lansdowne Letter

In the autumn of 1917 I received a visit from one of our footmen who was home upon leave. When I heard of his death a few weeks later I felt profoundly sad: he was not only a friend of mine, but I was haunted by the memory of our last conversation. After asking him several questions about the progress of the war he said: 20 Cavendish Square, 1917

"If you saw as many Germans as we do, you would know that none of them expect to break through to the coast. Is there anyone in England who thinks we are going to push the enemy back to Berlin, ma'am?"

His question was unanswerable, and it became clearer to me every day that the war could only end in one of three ways: Victory on the Battlefields; Conference; or Revolution. No sane man could imagine our Army pushing the Germans back to Berlin, and only an insane one could want Revolution.

When my footman said "Good-bye," he told me with bitterness how much he and his brother soldiers loathed the war: how they neither wanted to kill, or be killed; and implied that he would be only one more corpse to heighten the heap in the interval, before anyone of sufficient courage would come forward to suggest a temporary truce.

One morning shortly after this on the 29th of November my husband called me into his library.

20 Cavendish Square, 1917

Professor Gilbert Murray, Lord Charles Montagu and Lord Lansdowne were coming to lunch at 20 Cavendish Square and it was past one o'clock.

I found him walking up and down. He put the *Daily Telegraph* into my hands, saying:

"I would like you to read this quickly before Lansdowne arrives."

I sat down and read the following memorable letter addressed to the Editor and dated November 29th, 1917:

"SIR,*

"We are now in the fourth year of the most dreadful war the world has known; a war in which, as Sir W. Robertson has lately informed us, 'the killed alone can be counted by the million, while the total number of men engaged amounts to nearly twenty-four millions.' Ministers continue to tell us that they scan the horizon in vain for the prospect of a lasting peace.

"But those who believe that the wanton prolongation of the war would be a crime, differing only in degree from that of the criminals who provoked it, may be excused if they, too, scan the horizon anxiously in the hope of discovering there indications that the outlook may after all not be so hopeless as is supposed.

"The obstacles are indeed formidable enough. It is pointed out with force that, while we have not hesitated to put forward a general description of our war aims, the enemy have, though repeatedly challenged, refused to formulate theirs, and have limited themselves to vague and apparently insincere professions of readiness to negotiate with us.

"What are we fighting for? To beat the Germans? Certainly. But that is not an end in itself. We want to inflict signal defeat upon the Central Powers,

* This is a curtailed edition of Lord Lansdowne's letter.

not out of vindictiveness, but in the hope of saving the world from a recurrence of the calamity which has befallen this generation. 20 Cavendish Square, 1917

" What, then, is it we want when the war is over ? I know of no better formula that that made by Mr. Asquith in the speeches which he has from time to time delivered. He has repeatedly told his hearers that we are waging war in order to obtain reparation and security. In the way of reparation much can be accomplished, but the utmost effort to make good the ravages of this war must fall short and will fail to undo the grievous wrong which has been done to humanity. To end the war honourably would be a great achievement ; to prevent the same curse falling upon our children would be a greater achievement still.

" This is our avowed aim, and the magnitude of the issue cannot be exaggerated. For, just as this war has been more dreadful than any in history, so we may be sure would the next be even more dreadful than this. The prostitution of science for the purpose of pure destruction is not likely to stop short. Most of us, however, believe that it should be possible to secure posterity against the repetition of such an outrage as that of 1914. If the Powers will, under a solemn pact, bind themselves to submit future disputes to Arbitration ; if they will undertake to outlaw, politically and economically, any one of their number which refuses to enter into such a pact, or to use their joint military and naval forces for the purpose of coercing a Power which breaks away from the rest, they will have travelled far along the road which leads to security.

" We are not going to lose this war, but its prolongation will spell ruin for the civilized world, and an infinite addition to the load of human suffering which already weighs upon it.

20 Cavendish Square, 1917

"In my belief, if the war is to be brought to a close in time to avert a world-wide catastrophe, it will be brought to a close because on both sides the people of the countries involved realise that it has already lasted too long.

"There can be no question that this feeling prevails extensively in Germany, Austria and Turkey. We know beyond doubt that the economic pressure in those countries far exceeds any to which we are subject here. Ministers inform us in their speeches of 'constant efforts' on the part of the Central Powers to 'initiate peace talk' (Sir Eric Geddes at the Mansion House, November 9.)

"If the peace talk is not more articulate, and has not been so precise as to enable His Majesty's Government to treat it seriously, the explanation is probably to be found in the fact, first, that German despotism does not tolerate independent expressions of opinion, and, second, that the German Government has contrived, probably with success, to misrepresent the aims of the Allies, which are supposed to include the destruction of Germany.

"An immense stimulus would probably be given to the peace party in Germany if it were understood:

"1. That we do not desire the annihilation of Germany as a Great Power;

"2. That, except as a legitimate war measure, we have no desire to deny to Germany her place among the great commercial communities of the world;

"3. That we are prepared, when the war is over, to examine in concert with other Powers the group of international problems, some of them of recent origin, which are connected with the question of 'the freedom of the seas';

"4. We are prepared to enter into an inter-

national pact under which ample opportunities would be afforded for the settlement of international disputes by peaceful means. 20 Cavendish Square, 1917

"That an attempt should be made to bring about the kind of pact suggested is, I believe, common ground to all the Belligerents, and probably to all the Neutral Powers.

"If it be once established that there are no insurmountable difficulties in the way of agreement upon these points the political horizon might perhaps be scanned with better hope by those who pray, but can hardly at this moment venture to expect, that the New Year may bring us a lasting and honourable Peace.

"I am, Sir,
"Your obedient servant,
"LANSDOWNE.

LANSDOWNE HOUSE,
November 28th, 1917."

When I had finished, Henry said:

"This is an excellent and sensible letter which will make a great to-do! It is unfortunately ill-timed, but this it would be always called, whether he had published it when we were winning or losing. I am glad Lansdowne has had the courage to write it."

He went on to say that, though he had never had the faintest doubt—nor had he now—as to our ultimate Victory, he thought the war was likely to end on the same spot where it had begun, and that, if the minds of men could only see far enough, they would treat Lansdowne's ideas with respect.

At that moment we were interrupted by a servant announcing lunch.

After greeting my guests I looked at Lord Lansdowne and said to myself: "Here is a man of high honour and

20 Cavendish Square, 1917

estate, who, though a Unionist with most of his former colleagues in Office, has revolted against the ' Dog-fight ' speeches, the heartless swagger and inefficiency of the men who are governing us."

I told him during lunch what Henry had thought of his letter, at which he said :

" I am much relieved by what you say. As you know, long ago I said—*and you agreed*—that some Nation would have to speak first. If we all wait for the right moment we shall certainly wait for ever. With the collapse of Italy, and Russia in a state of Revolution, it is, of course, a bad time to speak, but, as I shall be cursed by everyone, a little more or less matters nothing. I agree with your husband ; neither the Allies nor the Germans will push their victory into the enemy's country, and the war will end where it began."

I told him what my footman had said, and added :

" It seems savagely cruel, and of doubtful wisdom, to pile up corpses for a delayed Conference."

Mr. Bonar Law, Lord Carson and every newspaper vied with the other next day in vilifying Lord Lansdowne, and London was seen at its worst. He was the " Bolo," the " Shirker," and the " Funk." The gutter Press published photographs of Lansdowne House bracketed with irrelevant pictures of slums and starving children ; nor was it outsiders alone who heaped infamy upon him, members of his own family publicly repudiated him.

I was interested to observe that this abuse was *not* universal in Mayfair, and some of our high Society had the courage to praise Lord Lansdowne, though in lowered voices. General Grant and other commanders, home on leave, informed me that many of our best soldiers, here and abroad, not only agreed with the letter, but *wished* it had been written months before.

In saying this I do not mean that Lord Lansdowne or any of his admirers thought that Germany would win the war. I personally never met anyone who thought

that—although I was told after the Armistice the names of a few who did—but many of the men whose judgment I valued foresaw, with singular accuracy, how little there is to be gained by a long war, even to the victors. Large fortunes, however, were being accumulated and it is surprising how easily non-combatants get acclimatised to Death. 20 Cavendish Square, 1917

CHAPTER XIV

The Maurice Debate, 1918

1918

The year 1918 opened by the enemy announcing their great Spring Offensive. This was advertised with such boldness and persistence throughout the entire German Press that many people did not believe in it. As public opinion is seldom right this would not have mattered, but, in spite of warnings from my husband and soldiers of eminence, the Government were equally short-sighted, and refused to do in time what they were afterwards compelled to do when it was almost too late: bring back to France troops which they had allowed to be dispersed in distant theatres.

The Versailles Conference, an assemblage of Nations, who while imposing in appearance were powerless in reality, had served the purpose of taking the eye off. After much talk in a Babel of languages, great decisions were taken behind the backs of our General Staff, and the British public knew little of what was going on. The desire to create an impression of success, and what is called strike the enemy in his weakest spot, and the Prime Minister's military and political manœuvres at that time must have lost us the war had it not been for an unforeseen incident.

On the 21st of March, Mr. Bonar Law made the following statement in the House of Commons:

"I may tell the House that this attack had been launched on the very part of our line which we were informed would be attacked by the enemy if an attack

were undertaken at all. Only three days ago we received information at the Cabinet from Headquarters in France that they had definitely come to the conclusion that an attack was going to be launched immediately. . . . I do feel justified in saying that as it has not come as a surprise, and as those responsible for our forces have foreseen, and have throughout believed that, if such an attack came, we should we well able to meet it, nothing that has happened gives us in this country *any cause whatever for additional anxiety.*" 1918

This speech, emphasizing the fact that the attack had come where it had been expected, coupled with the information daily repeated, that the British Army had never been stronger or better equipped, made the rumours of our military disasters on the Western Front unbelievable ; and when the news of the enemy's deep penetration into our lines was confirmed, and we learnt that at the very time Mr. Bonar Law was speaking our soldiers were suffering the greatest military defeat ever inflicted on the British Army, everyone was bewildered or outraged.

We were informed that between the 22nd of March and 1st of April the Germans had, in a series of amazing successes, advanced their battle line forty miles, and at the urgent request of Lord Haig and Lord Milner the Supreme Command of the Allied Forces had been taken over by Marshal Foch.

Unity of command under a generalissimo was not a new idea. It had been seriously considered and rejected on sufficient grounds by my husband, Lord Kitchener, the Allied Staffs and—after the failure of Nivelle—by Mr. Lloyd George ; but the tragic happenings in the Spring of 1918 converted men upon the spot, and the views of the Easternites underwent a convulsive, tardy, but wholesome change.

The appointment of the great French soldier restored confidence and was received with universal acclamation ; but the situation remained anxious, and the conflict

1918 continued between those who believed in triumph in the East and those who foresaw the danger on the West.

Reviewing the situation now, it seems incredible that anyone could have been as wanting in sense as to believe that striking the Turk was killing the German, but the moral purpose of the conflict had degenerated, and spectacular effects to cheer the faint-hearted and bamboozle the public were the order of the day.

Nothing throughout the war betrayed the value of men's judgment, or the quality of their characters more than the opinions they held as to the relative dangers that lay in the East or in the West.

There was only one great strategic conception in the war, and that was the Dardanelles; once that had failed, it was obvious to Sir William Robertson, Sir Frederick Maurice and Sir Douglas Haig that we had to stone-wall the West, and that every side-show was a drain upon our resources.

On the 23rd of March, 1918, the Kaiser's telegram to his wife was published:

> "Pleased to be able to tell you that by the Grace of God the Battles at Moully, Cambrai, St. Quentin, and La Fere have been won. The Lord has gloriously aided. May He further help.—WILHELM."

Someone said that the Kaiser's telegram reminded them of a parody on his grandfather's (King William of Prussia) messages to his consort during the 1870 Campaign:

> "By right Divine, my dear Augusta,
> We've had another awful buster;
> Ten thousand Frenchmen sent below,
> Praise God from Whom all blessings flow."

In spite of a bombardment of questions put daily by Liberals in the House of Commons as to the fighting

MARSHAL FOCH

strength upon our dangerously extended line, the country was kept in complete ignorance, and it was not until the 9th of April that Mr. Lloyd George made a statement in the House which satisfied the ignorant but terrified the Army. 1918

Referring to the series of set-backs we had had, and defending his policy in the East, the Prime Minister said :

" What was the position at the beginning of the battles ? Notwithstanding the heavy casualties in 1917 the Army in France was considerably stronger on the 1st* of January, 1918, than on the 1st of January, 1917.

Further on in the same speech he told us that we had only one white Division in Egypt, and only three in Palestine.

On the 7th of May the man who had held the position of the greatest responsibility throughout the war, that of Director of Military Operations—General Sir Frederick Maurice—published his famous letter in all the London papers categorically denying the accuracy of the Prime Minister's statements. May 7th, 1918

Nothing since the Lansdowne letter showed as much courage as this, and everyone in London who knew anything about the matter was in a state of indignant perturbation. Telling the truth is always unpopular and usually regarded as a blunder, but sacrificing half your income and the whole of your career for it, was looked upon as a crime, and we watched with interest the bluster of our thoughtful Press, and the Chinese antics of the Government.

Some of the newspapers said the letter was " prompted by the personal pettiness of Mr. Asquith," and other affirmed that Sir Frederick Maurice was an intriguer and a Pacifist.

I did not know General Maurice by sight until the

* Hansard, Vol. 104, No. 24, page 1, 328.

May 7th, 1918

year 1920, and neither my husband nor anyone connected with us had any conversation with him about the events which led up to and followed the publication of his letter.

Three years later, in 1922, General Maurice told me that the only person he had approached at that time was Lord Salisbury. In the course of a conversation about his letter he said :

" I may have been foolishly punctilious, Mrs. Asquith, as far as my own interests were concerned, but I decided that I must act entirely alone, first because I would not give away confidential information, and secondly because I felt I could not ask anyone to share the responsibility of advising me in a matter which so vitally affected my future. I went over to France in the middle of April, 1918, and I there heard that Mr. Lloyd George's statements of April 9th had produced consternation and were regarded as a direct attack upon Haig. On my return I consulted Lord Salisbury, because I regarded him as a man of the highest honour representing a large body of the best Conservative opinion in the country, and one who would advise me without Party passion and in the best interest of the Army. I told him what I had heard in France, and the fears I had as to what would happen in our Army there if the policy of throwing the blame for what had happened on to the soldiers was continued. I told Lord Salisbury no secrets and I only sent him a copy of my letter on the same day as I sent it to the Press. The decision to write the letter was made by me without consultation with anyone because I could not give anyone the full facts. I wrote it to prevent the crime of sacking Haig after a false case had been trumped up against him. I did not believe that we could win if we didn't fight clean."

Had the affair not been so alarming, we would have been more than amused by the hysterical comments made and written at the time. The views of the fashion-

able female in moments of national crisis seldom disappoint one, and when a Tory lady who was in the habit of ejaculating "Cad!" in the middle of Mr. Lloyd George's speeches in the Speaker's gallery said to me on the afternoon of the day the Maurice letter appeared that every French and British soldier adored Lloyd George, and would resent what Sir Frederick had written, adding that she hoped he would be shot as a traitor, I knew where I was. May 7th, 1918

Sir William and Lady Robertson lunched with us on the 7th, and I had a talk with him before going down to the House of Commons. I asked him what he imagined would be the effect of Sir Frederick Maurice's letter upon the public, to which he replied:

"Every word of Maurice's letter is not only true but unanswerable, Mrs. Asquith, and, if the British people are as clear-sighted, courageous and loyal as my fine friend, they will stand by him to a man; but it is not the fashion of the present Government to be loyal to the soldiers or to anyone else."

"Well," I said, "whenever the debate takes place in the House my husband will stand by him if he is the only man in the Division lobby!" to which Sir William answered:

"The red herring that will be drawn across the scent is always the same, my dear lady; and will be repeated in the House of Commons. 'Out to win the War' is a taking cry, and has not only hoodwinked the public but done grave injustice to your husband. What I say is, show me the men who are out to lose it; the only ones I know are X—— and his friends, and unless they are watched they will certainly succeed."

I asked him if he thought a full and accurate report of our military failures of March and April would ever be permitted to see the light of day, to which he gave a guarded reply.

After lunch we drove to the House of Commons, and,

May 7th, 1918

in an answer to a question put by my husband, pointing out the gravity of the charges made by Sir Frederick Maurice, Mr. Bonar Law, looking pained and deprecatory, and speaking for the Prime Minister—who did not appear—suggested there should be an Inquiry, and gave the 9th as a day for the Debate.

It is interesting to speculate at this time of day what would have happened had Sir William Robertson been Chief of our Staff in the Spring of that year, but a series of acrobatic feats during the early weeks of February—in which it would be difficult to say which of the men in high places came out the worst—had succeeded in putting Sir Henry Wilson in his place, while retaining the services of Lord Derby at the War Office.

When it was announced on February 19th that Sir William Robertson had been transferred to the Eastern Command as a reward for his long services, I heard shouts in the House of Commons of "Boy Scouts!" "Kent coast!" etc. Nor was the British public any happier when a few days later the campaign was opened to get rid of Sir Douglas Haig.

During all this time not a murmur of criticism against either the methods or policy of the Government was permitted; and my husband gave serious offence by saying in a public speech that he was accused of breaking every Commandment whenever he made the mildest protest, except that subsection of the tenth, which forbad him to covet his neighbour's ass.

The anti-Haig campaign began well, but collapsed with the alarm produced by the Maurice letter, and the Government was shaking in its shoes.

20 Cavendish Square was besieged by men of all kinds, and every shade of opinion. Unionists, to whom the name of Asquith was anathema, poured in as well as retired officers, Peers, journalists, Editors and Commoners, to implore my husband to stand by the soldiers and save England.

The Editor of the best written of all our Tory papers, a complete stranger, and a man who had genuinely believed every fable about Henry, called upon me. May 7th, 1918

After a generous apology for some of the nonsense his paper had published, we entered into a long political conversation, and I was struck by his transparent simplicity and the honesty of his purpose. It is difficult to understand why even gentlemen journalists are so ill-informed, and there is something pathetic in going through life imagining you are leading public opinion when you are merely following it.

Mr. G—— said if my husband could but stand by our soldiers he would not only save us from defeat in the War, but it would be a decision which he would never regret; and added that he was in close touch with Unionists of every description, and felt sure they would back him to a man in both Houses. He spoke in the highest terms of Sir William Robertson, going as far as to suggest he might become Prime Minister of the country if my husband would only serve under him. I said I did not think Sir William had any wish to occupy this position, but assured him that my husband had not the slightest intention of deserting either Sir Frederick Maurice or our soldiers, whether he was, or whether he was not, backed by the great Unionist Party.

When Henry and I were alone he told me he had seen Lord Salisbury among others that morning, and found him deeply exercised. I said that his influence in the Lords, and the men of honour in the Commons—Sir Frederick Banbury, Lord Robert Cecil, Lord Henry Bentinck and other Unionists of repute, were certain to vote with us, as there was no chance of our having a large enough majority to turn the Government out; and that by now most people must have discovered the price our unhappy soldiers were paying for the reckless gambles of the Cabinet. To this he replied that, if the Unionist Party in either House had as much courage or indepen-

May 7th, 1918

dence as I attributed to them, they would not have been led by the nose for such a long time, and ended by making me a bet that, when the moment arrived, not one of them would stick to their guns either in the House of Lords or the House of Commons.

Between the 7th and the 9th, the Cabinet, at the instigation of Mr. Balfour, changed its mind, and the Inquiry—which they had themselves suggested—was turned into a vote of censure. It was the only chance they had of protecting themselves from criticism, and the patriotic drum of showing the enemy a united front was easy and cheap to beat. No one ever gauged the value of the late House of Commons or of the present one with more cynical precision than Mr. Lloyd George, and he was bound to succeed once he realized the negligible moral fibre of the majority of his supporters.

In spite of the confidence some of the better informed had in my husband's reluctance to give away the sources* of his information the Government was terrified. They knew that without quoting his authority he would be expressing the well-known and considered opinion of the High Command, and feared that when he had finished speaking he might be backed by some eloquent and unsuspected man of character in the House. In consequence, anything and everything was promised to Members upon either side who would support them in the Division Lobby on the day of the Debate.

May 9th, 1918

It is never easy, and often ineffectual to fire small arms at guns of position ; but when I went down to the House of Commons on the 9th recollecting what had been said to me by indignant Unionists and other brave men, I felt convinced that Henry had underrated not only the moral courage but the common sense of the House, and that, although it had sometimes turned a blind eye upon much that was dishonourable and untrue,

* We received many private letters from the Front expressing the deepest anxiety over the situation.

it was awake and in earnest that day, and would stand loyally by our soldiers to repudiate the menacing and disastrous side-shows conducted from 10 Downing Street. May 9th 1918

Upon my arrival I found my husband's room full of his devoted supporters.

As it was the first time since leaving Downing Street that he had censured the Government, many of them were anxious he should withdraw his motion, begging him not to give so cheap a triumph to his Opponents. They pointed out with truth that the huge majority which would be whipped up against him would be misunderstood, and might discourage Liberals all over the country. His answer was simple, nor could he be induced to alter it.

"I will not throw over Maurice, or any other soldier in this war; and if I am the only man I shall register my vote against the Government to-day."

The debate was not well managed; there was no one to answer Mr. Lloyd George's popular perorations, and the force of Henry's opening speech was fatally diminished by his inability to give away the sources of his information. The result was a foregone conclusion. Fear, promises, and assiduous whipping gave the Government a large majority.

The satisfaction of having done the right thing was enhanced to my husband when in scanning the Division lists he observed to me that with the exception of our dear friend, Aubrey Herbert,* the men I had believed in had all run away.

I have sometimes wondered what would have happened if any man that afternoon had had the courage to check the levity and recklessness of the Government by winding up the Maurice debate with words like these:

"The Angel of Death has been abroad throughout the land; you may almost hear the beating of His wings. There is no one . . . to sprinkle with blood the lintel and the side-posts of our doors, that He may spare and

* Col. The Hon. Aubrey Herbert.

May 9th, 1918

pass on; He takes His victims from the castle of the noble, the mansion of the wealthy, and the cottage of the poor and lowly, and it is on behalf of all these classes that I make this solemn appeal. Even if I were alone, if my voice were the solitary one raised amid the din of arms and the clamour of a venal Press, I should have the consolation I have to-night, and which I trust will be mine to the last moment of my existence, the priceless consolation, that no word of mine has tended to promote the squandering of my country's treasure or the spilling of one single drop of my country's blood."

CHAPTER XV

The Armistice

When my daughter Elizabeth ran into my bedroom at midnight in her nightgown on the 10th of November, 1918, to tell me that the war was over, I felt as numb as an old piano with broken notes in it. The strain of four years—waiting and watching, opening and reading telegrams upon matters of life and death, and the recurring news of failure at the Front had blunted all my receptive powers, and what she said did not seem to penetrate me. 20 Cavendish Square, Sunday, November 10th, 1918

A young man from the War Office had rung her up to tell her that the Germans had signed the Armistice. I put on my dressing-gown and took her into her father's room, where we found him reading. Being far too excited to go to bed, we sat together talking over the probable terms of Peace till far into the morning.

After drinking my tea at 6 o'clock the next day and feeling too tired to write my diary, I lay awake reviewing the past and chronicling in my mind the many events that had taken place since we had left Downing Street. Monday, November 11th, 1918

The door suddenly opened and my husband came into the room to say that what we had heard and discussed in the middle of the night was inaccurate, as the Germans had not signed after all. I felt no surprise, but he had hardly shut the door before the bell of my telephone started ringing, and taking up the receiver I recognised the voice of my American friend, Mr. Paul Cravath :

Monday, November 11th, 1918

"The Germans signed the Armistice at 5.30 this morning and the War is over," he said.

I ran downstairs and gave orders for as many flags as could be bought, for the house, the roof, and the motor; and wrote three telegrams. The first was to the King, the second to Queen Alexandra, and the third to General Sir John Cowans; I took them into my husband's room and we signed them: "Henry Margot Asquith."

While reading the newspapers, odd noises from the streets broke upon my ears. Faint sounds of unfinished music; a medley of guns, maroons, cheering, and voices shouting "The British Grenadiers," and "God Save the King." I looked out of the window and saw elderly nurses in uniform, and stray men and women clasping each other round the waist, laughing and dancing in the centre of the street.

It was a brilliant day and the sky was light.

Henry and I felt it our duty to attend the cremation of a relative, and motored to Golders Green immediately after breakfast. I had never been there before, and was struck by the bleakness of the ceremony.

Just as Railway Stations are man without God, so is the Cremation a funeral without a landscape. A button is pressed and an elaborate kind of casket—if less clumsy quite as costly as a coffin—disappears upon runners through the wall, and your mind, which should be bowed over the silence and inevitability of Death—as interpreted by the fine Burial Service—is alive and quickened by curiosity over the mechanism of the folding doors, and the subsequent consignment of the casket.

Nothing, however, could affect us seriously that morning. The whole thoughts of the scanty congregation were either circulating round the signatories of the Armistice, or centred on some nameless grave in France.

When we returned from Hampstead we could see the progress that the great news had made. Flags, big and little, of every colour and nationality were flying from

roofs, balconies and windows. The men who were putting them up were waving their caps at each other from the top of high ladders, and conventional pedestrians were whistling or dancing breakdowns on the pavement; a more spontaneous outbreak of simple gaiety could hardly have been imagined, and I have sometimes wondered if any of the Allies on that day gave way to such harmless explosions of innocent joy. Monday, November 11th, 1918

We arrived at No. 20 and found that our thoughtful butler, with praiseworthy patriotism, had smothered the house in flags; even the Welsh harp could be seen fluttering greenly from the window of Henry's library.

I was told that in a short time it would be impossible to move in the streets except upon foot, as they were already jammed with waggons, trollies, motor-cars and coster-carts; and that the queues outside the shops which sold flags were of such a length as to block the passage of any passers-by. On hearing this I jumped into the motor and told our chauffeur to drive down the main streets so that I might see the crowd. It was a wonderful sight, and more like a foreign carnival than what we are accustomed to in this country. Heavy motor-lorries were flying backwards and forwards stacked with munition workers; males and females in brilliant colours were standing on each other's shoulders yelling and waving flags or shaking tambourines at one another. Everyone was nailing up some sort of decoration, or quizzing their neighbour. No one intended to work that day, nor could they be expected to when the whole world was rejoicing.

On my return home I found my husband standing in the front hall holding a telegram. He put his arm round my shoulder, and, side by side, we read:

> "I thank you both with all my heart. I look back with gratitude to your wise counsel and calm

Monday, November 11th, 1918

resolve in the days when great Issues had to be decided resulting in our entry into the war, which now, thank God, has been brought to an end.

"GEORGE, R.I."

We looked at each other with tears in our eyes.

I opened two other telegrams addressed to myself, one from Queen Alexandra, and the other from my little son.

"In the great rejoicing which we share with you and the people all over our Empire, we do not forget your husband to-day.

"ALEXANDRA."

"Blessings and love, my darling mother. Do you know this from Euripedes: 'The things that must be are so strangely great!'

"ANTHONY."

After lunch we motored to the House of Commons to hear the terms of the Armistice read by Mr. Lloyd George.

Thinking the Speaker's Gallery would be crowded I went alone, but to my surprise it was almost empty and I wished profoundly that I had taken Elizabeth, as I enjoy nothing to the same degree without her or Anthony, and on such an occasion could have wished they had both been with me.

The grille of the Gallery having been removed I was able to put my elbows on the rail and watch excited members rushing through the glass doors into the House.

The Prime Minister and my husband received a great ovation upon their entry, and every man was moved when Mr. Lloyd George rose to read the terms of the Armistice.

The French Army, led by their victorious Generals, was to march into Germany and occupy both the banks

of the Rhine, while our soldiers were to guard over Berlin and other towns of importance. The entire German Navy was to sail into Rosyth between the lines of our men-of-war ranged up upon either side. We would watch from decks cleared for action battleships that had seldom left the Kiel Canal, thick with barnacles, and stripped of paint, slowly sail into harbour with all our guns pointing at them; and every soldier was to surrender his sword upon every Front. Monday, November 11th, 1918

I pressed my forehead into my hands and a wave of emotion moved across my heart. To the average individual the Terms that we had listened to were what had been expected; but I could only conjecture with compassion what they must mean to a proud race who, until 1914, had everything that industry and science could achieve, and had maintained a conflict for four years, in which they expected not only to beat France, but half Europe; and not for the first time I felt I was in a position to obey the High Command that tells us to extend mercy with judgment.

A thanksgiving service in Westminster had been improvised by the Archbishop of Canterbury, and when the Prime Minister finished speaking we all walked across Parliament Square to St. Margaret's.

As I was alone I had to fight my way through the crowd, and, had it not been for a policeman who recognised me, I could never have got into the church.

After taking my seat, I observed that all the Peers and the Commons were placed in the centre of St. Margaret's, and the women in the side aisles.

The Archbishop read a simple service in moving tones, and the whole congregation joined in singing "O God our help in ages past."

I thought of the chapter in Isaiah where it says:

"And strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, and the sons of the alien shall be your plowmen and your vine-dressers.

Monday, November 11th, 1918

"For I the Lord love judgment, I hate robbery for burnt offering; and I will direct their work in truth, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them."

I found my mind straying to the terms of the Armistice, and wondered whether the Germans also were saying their prayers; and if so to what God; the God of Peace, or the God of War?

When I returned to 20 Cavendish Square, my beautiful nieces,* Laura Lovat and Diana Capel, were waiting to have tea with me. They described how they had spent several hours of the morning outside Buckingham Palace, where a crowd had collected the moment the maroons informed the people that the war was over. They said that everyone in London, rich and poor, fashionable and obscure, were standing and shouting for the King, and many of the spectators had tears in their eyes; that, when they left, the crowd was greater than when they arrived, and was accumulating every minute.

I told them that as I was engaged to go and see Lord Stamfordham I would have to leave them, and we parted after tea.

It was dark and wet when I arrived at the Palace, and the court-yard so packed with people that I had to get out of the motor and walk.

The King and Queen were sitting on a balcony exposed to the rain, and two dazzling stage reflectors illuminated their faces. The people below were shouting hymns or patriotic songs, and "God save the King" was being played on every kind of instrument. The W.A.A.C.'s and the W.R.N.'s were parading in close formation in the outer yard, and, when I stopped to look up at the King, their Commander-in-Chief, with the rudeness habitual to women in authority, hustled me unceremoniously out of the way.

The King was in khaki, a uniform which he had worn since the first day of the War—and the Queen was dressed

* Lady Lovat and the Hon. Mrs. Capel.

in pretty light colours with diamonds and pearls round her neck. She has at all times a lively, lovely smile, and the public were cheering two very happy people that day. Monday, November 11th, 1918

Finding myself pushed about by female agriculturists, female soldiers and female police, I took refuge from the rain with the King of Portugal, who was standing in the Palace doorway.

After a little conversation with him, a servant showed me into Lord Stamfordham's room.

The knowledge that to many, and very specially to him, the end of the War could not mean the end of mourning. I embraced him on both cheeks and after congratulating him on the love and service he had rendered to his King, we sat down unable to speak for emotion.

After a pause he told me that during Their Majesties' drive in the afternoon the poorest of the poor had clung to their carriage and by special request of the King had not been interfered with by the police. He said that nothing could have exceeded the enthusiasm of all His Majesty's subjects.

As boxes, telegrams and people came in and out while we were talking, and my friend looked exhausted, I left him.

The rain had not stopped when I walked out of the Palace, and the King and Queen were still bowing on the balcony (I was informed afterwards that they did not leave it till after midnight, except for their meals and their drive).

On the following day we went to the General Thanksgiving Service in St. Paul's Cathedral. November 12th, 1918

Thoroughly exhausted, my thoughts strayed, and I was reminded of the American Ambassador's conversation with Elizabeth when, after a similar service had taken place the year before, upon the entry of America into the war (April 20th, 1917), my daughter had called at the American Embassy.

November 12th, 1918

Mr. Page was not only one of the wisest but one of the best of men. His lanky, dislocated figure was easily recognised, and the pathos, humour, and gestures of his face had gained him the confidence and delight of us all.

He will ever remain a hero in the minds of my countrymen, as we cannot but connect the illness which ended with his death as having been brought about by the continued efforts he made to bring his President and his people into the war.

Being a very great friend of ours, a few days after we heard that America had come in, my daughter Elizabeth went to see him. She was shocked by his appearance. Excitement and apprehension had protected him like a scaffolding, but when the strain was removed, the shakiness of the structure was revealed, and she saw without knowing it a doomed man standing in front of her.

" Dearest Mr. Page," she said, " you look ill ; you can see me any day, but send me away now, as I love you far too much to tire you." To which he answered :

" My dear, it isn't talking to you that tires me ; but I have received the Representatives of ten American Associations to-day, each of which has asked for a speech to be delivered in the Albert Hall. I said to them :

" ' Gentlemen, we're under the very serious temptation of making fools of ourselves. It is a temptation that we shall probably not resist, therefore it appears to me that a service in St. Paul's Cathedral would give us less opportunity than any other form of public ceremony.' "

While my memory was straying upon this and other matters the service came to an end and we all hustled out of the Cathedral.

We had been invited to lunch with the King, an order we were proud to accept as we wanted to thank him in

PRINCE AND PRINCESS BIBESCO

person for his telegram of the day before, and after leaving St. Paul's we motored straight to the Palace. November 12th, 1918

There was no sign of fatigue in Their Majesties' faces when they greeted us, and the devotion shown by their subjects the day before had put them both in the highest spirits.

After kissing the Queen's hand, I said to her:

"You ought to be a very proud woman to-day, Ma'am, when all over Europe such sorrows are happening to Monarchs and Rulers, to feel how much you and His Majesty are loved by a free and happy people."

I was touched to see her eyes fill with tears. The King took my hand in both of his, and said with that directness and simplicity which are peculiarly his own:

"No man, Mrs. Asquith, ever had a better or wiser friend than I had, and *have* in your husband."

A few days later, Henry seconded the address of congratulation to the King, which was moved by Mr. Lloyd George in the House of Commons. November 19th, 1918

It was a great occasion, and one which he took advantage of in a noble speech. Rising after Mr. George had sat down, he said:

"I am sure that the whole House will desire to associate itself with the admirable words in which my right hon. friend has moved this address, and with the terms of the address itself. When history comes to tell the tale of these four years, it will recount a story the like of which is not to be found in any epic in any literature. It is and will remain by itself as a record of everything Humanity can dare or endure—of the extremes of possible heroism and, we must add, of possible baseness, and, above and beyond all, the slow moving but in the end irresistible power of a great Ideal.

"The old world has been laid waste. Principalities and Powers, to all appearances inviolable and invincible, which seem to dominate a large part of the families of mankind, lie in the dust. All things have become new.

November, 1918

"In this great and cleansing purging it has been the privilege of our country to play her part—a part worthy of a people who have learned themselves beforehand the lesson to practise the example of ordered Freedom. The time has not come to distribute praise between those who, in civil life and naval and military action, have won this great victory, but, as my right honourable friend has well said, we can anticipate that task by rendering at once a heartfelt, unstinted tribute to the occupant of the Throne.

"I had the privilege to be Prime Minister when His Majesty ascended the Throne, and I continued to hold that office until more than two years had passed of the progress of the War. There is no one who can bear testimony—first-hand testimony—more authentic or more heartfelt than I do to the splendid example which His Majesty has set in time of peace, as well as in time of war, in the discharge of every one, day by day, of the responsible duties which fall to the Sovereign of this Empire. In the crash of thrones, built, some of them, on unrighteousness, propped up in other cases by a brittle framework of convention, the Throne of this country stands unshaken, broad-based on the people's will. It has been reinforced to a degree which it is impossible to measure, a living example of our Sovereign and his gracious Consort, who have always felt and shown by their life and by their conduct that they are there not to be ministered unto, but to minister.

"As the right hon. gentleman said, monarchies in these days are held, if they continue to be held, not by the shadowy claim of any so-called Divine Right, not, as has been the case with the Hapsburgs and Hohenzollerns, by any power of dividing and dominating popular forces and popular will, not by pedigree and not by traditions; they are held, and can only be held, by the highest form of public service; by understanding, by sympathy with the common lot and by devotion to the common weal. There are some lines of one of our old

poets which are perhaps worth recalling, as they sum up and express the feelings of many of us to-day : November, 1918

> " ' The glories of our blood and State
> Are shadows, not substantial things.
> There is no armour against fate,
> Death lays his icy hand on kings.' "

" And at the end of these fine lines he adds, what we in these testing times in Great Britain have seen and proved to be the secret and the safeguard of our Monarchy :

> " ' Only the actions of the just
> Smell sweet and blossom in the dust.' "

CHAPTER XVI

President Wilson. The General Election of 1918

1918 After the signing of the Armistice it seemed a strange moment for anyone to think of themselves, and, when I heard it rumoured that there was to be an Election, I did not believe it.

The defeated Party is apt to describe the General Election as an outrage ; but I do not think anyone to-day would say the Khaki Elections of December, 1918, had been other than a great political crime.

The chief blame of the "Coupon" Election will be ascribed in history to Mr. Lloyd George. It broke the historic Liberal Party to pieces at the moment when Liberalism—and especially British Liberalism—was most needed at Versailles. To this assassination, and the Coalition Government which followed, most of the disastrous mistakes of the succeeding four years can be attributed. The drowsiest summer owl might have observed that both the strength and the weakness of Mr. Lloyd George lay in his having no policy. Neither his personal charm, infinite persuasiveness, the quick changes of an agile mind nor his eloquent speeches on the British aristocracy had captivated the confidence of the Conservative Party, and the Leader* of the Diehards, in a spasm of courage, wrote a fine letter to the *Morning Post*, saying there was something wrong with *their* Augean Stables and he thought that they should be purified.

* The Marquis of Salisbury.

1918

But the spasm passed, and a few days later, at a time when every moment was vital, and Peace was the Prayer of an exhausted Europe, he and the whole of his Party acquiesced in the coup of the coupon and we did what no other Ally thought of doing, we had a General Election within two months of the Armistice, *when men's hearts were tired, their minds confused, and the flower of the nation was still abroad.*

The French and British people encouraged by the patriotic cries of "Hang the Kaiser! and make the Germans pay"—modestly followed by "the man who won the war"—were convinced that Germany was to be crushed, and it was not until afterwards that they discovered the enemy was the Liberal Party.

I will quote from my diary what I wrote of the last day of the 1918 Elections.

From my Diary, Saturday, December 28th, 1918

"This fateful day for us, opened by Henry, Gilbert Murray and Edward Grey going on a Deputation to convey to President Wilson the admiration they felt for his great Idea involved in the League of Nations.

"They started at 10.30 in the morning, and, when their interview was over, my husband and I motored through the decorated streets to attend the Guildhall, where a great company had been invited to see the Freedom of the City of London conferred upon the American President.

"We received a warm reception as we walked through the aisle of people up to the platform, and watched a ceremony with which we were all familiar.

"I sat next to Lord Cave, a kind and sensible man who had been strong enough when he was Home Secretary to oppose the meanest and most cowardly of all the Government stunts—turning men and women of German name out of this country, even when their sons had fought and died for us.

"In a short talk before the company was seated, he spoke with contempt of the methods of the Government,

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but in this he is not peculiar, as I never met a Tory who praised them. Every eye was upon President Wilson—a figure of world-wide reputation—who was seated next to his wife on a vast gold chair in the centre of the platform.

"I examined his lanky face, egotistical, slightly sensual mouth, and charming if too frequent smile, and noted the refinement of his brow and nostrils.

"He made an excellent though rather uninspiring speech, but, disliking oratory of the rose and sky type and the long pauses of the highly prepared, I admired the President's penetrating calm. Each sentence was perfect in structure, and he might have sat down after any one of them. He spoke in a voice which everyone could hear, nor did he indulge in a quotable peroration.

"When I was praising this speech, in the interval between the Freedom of the City and the Mansion House luncheon, Mr. Davis* said to me:

"'Yes, Mrs. Asquith, I agree; Wilson doesn't pull many feathers out of the Eagle's tail.'

"At this moment Henry came up and introduced me to the President, with whom I had a short but memorable conversation. I found him easy to talk to and much quicker than most of the famous Americans I have met.

"He told me that he had only got to express a sound opinion in a common-sense manner, and he was at once accused of being both unpractical and a dreamer; that obviously to prepare for another war was less practical than to prepare for Peace.

"When I was talking to him I wondered why he was so much disliked, and if he would not have had a larger following in his own country had he made a moral protest or pronouncement of some sort over Belgium in the early days of the war. The League of Nations, in which lie our best hopes, might have been less hated if it had been

* Mr. Davis succeeded Mr. Page as American Ambassador.

proposed by a man of indignation; whereas now it jars on America, enfuriates France, confuses Italy, and is suspected in England.

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"People say: 'It's all very well, Wilson hasn't suffered in the War! *He* can dictate with his cool head and colder heart that a League of Nations, which includes Germany, will give us a Peace that we all want, or *ought* to want. But we'll never stand that! Germany must be made to suffer *all* and *more* than she has made others suffer. We must bring this home to her in *every* way, from generation to generation. We won't let America save Germany from the consequences of her defeat, or deprive us and the Allies of the consequences of our victory.'

"The mistaken part of this reasoning is that there is no 'Victory'; and the revengeful Peace for which men clamour means a return to old rivalries, and the subsequent preparation for War. As the Germans are the most orderly, scientific, and hard-working of the European races, Germany will ultimately suffer less than the Allies, and to what good purpose can be the perpetuation of Hate?

"I am only interested in the President inasmuch as he wants to rebuild a dying world instead of inflicting fresh wounds, and it matters little what instrument is used if it can fulfil this purpose.

"War should be made, if not inevitable by a League of Nations, at least as difficult as possible. The public in France and America seem to think this is Idealism, which in the minds of the commonplace is another word for ridiculous.

"It is sad to think that the men who fought the War are not likely to have a voice in the Peace, and those who stay at home are generally the Jingoes who want to make War a going concern.

"When Henry gave South Africa its Constitution, many of my friends, not only the Tories—who, to quote

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Disraeli, have always been the stupid party—but men on our own side, said :

" ' Surely, surely, Margot ! ! after having beaten the Boers you are not going to give them back their Freedom ! Is your husband insane? Have all our lovers, sons and husbands died in vain ? '

" According to Man, our dead always die in vain unless we listen to Christ's teaching. But we don't ; we listen to the Clergy, and are seldom disappointed with the provinciality of the Christ that they parody.

" President Wilson is trying to emulate the famous saying of the 18th century :

" ' Christianity has been tried and failed, the Religion of Christ remains to be tried.'

" The Republican Party in America stands for many things with which I am out of sympathy, but I cannot believe their dislike of the President is entirely political. From what I hear he is an Egotist; uncertain in his personal relations because he is not grateful ; and a man who trusts few and those mostly his inferiors.

" This last is what really counts : men who like their inferiors seldom achieve high purposes. Nevertheless, President Wilson will go down to History as having produced the only Great Idea in the War, and, after listening to one of the finest speeches that I ever heard in my life at the Mansion House lunch, I said to myself :

" ' What is there that this man could not do, if his moral stature was comparable to his intellectual expression ? '

" When he had finished speaking—knowing as I did that the Election returns might be out at any moment—I felt an apprehensive but burning curiosity to hear what had happened. I was about to ask a waiter behind me if he could find out some of the figures, when I heard a man say :

" ' Herbert Samuel, McKinnon Wood, and Runciman are out.'

Woodrow Wilson

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" We left the dining-room and made our way down to the crowded front door. People waiting for their motors were standing in groups discussing the Election returns.

" ' McKenna is beat : Montagu is in by over 9,000,' was whispered from mouth to mouth, while the men thrust their arms into their coat sleeves changing their cigars from hand to hand in the process, and asking for their motors.

" The news spread ; man after man of ours was out.

" ' Were we all *beaten ?* . . . who *could* I ask ? . . . who would tell me ? ' Henry crushed up against me and said calmly :

" ' I see our footman.'

" Lady Cave pushed up and took my arm ; I suppose I looked pale as she said :

" ' You are a brave woman, don't turn a hair ! the thing *can't* last ! it's a disgrace ! a fraud, and a sham.'

" Among the crush in the large open doorway, waiting for his motor, I perceived Rufus Reading, looking snow-white. Did he or did he not know if Henry was beaten ? . . . perhaps they all knew.

" I was jammed up against my husband and had no idea what he had heard.

" I looked at him out of the corner of my eyelids ; he was standing a little in front of me, but not a sign of any kind could be seen on his face. A man pushed up to us and said :

" ' Never you mind ! the Elections have been fought on gigantic *lies* ; no one could tell the truth, but it will come out some day, and I hope they will all be severely punished ! '

" ' Who are you ? ' I asked vaguely.

" ' I've written on the *Morning Post* for 15 years,' the man answered. ' I'm a hot Liberal and believe in Asquith. He's the only man who ought to be on the Peace Conference. You stick to it ! *and make him stick,* for if he is

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not put on the Conference this country is lost. God bless you.'

" He slipped away—and after two kind squeezes from the Caves, and a lift of the hat from Rufus, we drove away in our motor, leaning back silent and exhausted.

" I saw as if in a trance the cheering crowds, eager faces, mounted police, and swaying people, while we shot down the streets with our minds set and stunned. Not one word did we say till we got near home ; then Henry broke the silence :

" ' I only hope,' he said, ' that *I* have not got in ; with all the others out this would be the last straw.'

" 'I expect we're all out,' I said : ' they are sure to have sent us the figures to Cavendish Square from the Whip's Office, aren't they ? or do you suppose they've sent them to the Wharf ? '

" ' We're certain to get the figures,' Henry answered.

" The motor slowed down ; we had arrived. I jumped out and ran through the open door in front of Henry ; I found the odd man labelling our luggage piled up in the hall. Not a note or a message of any kind was to be seen.

" Henry went into his library, and I rang up 21 Abingdon Street on the telephone in my boudoir.

" Not got in all the returns yet ? . . . . . ' Yes ? . . . . . All our Whips out ? . . . . . *Yes?* . . East Fife ? *Yes* ? . . . . . Asquith beat ! ' *What* ? ? BEAT ? ? Thank God, Thank God ! ! ' I said and looking up I saw Maud Tree* standing behind me. Covering her face with her hands she burst into tears and said :

" ' Oh ! I can't bear it ! ! darling, darling Margot ! ! it's NOT true ! ! '

" Still holding the receiver, I said :

" ' Yes ? Go on—Yes . . . Yes . . .'

" Henry came in and Maud left the room.

* Lady Tree.

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"'I'm out, am I?' said he; 'ask by how much; tell them to give us the figures, will you?'

"'Give me the East Fife figures,' I said, and taking a pencil wrote:

"Asquith 6994—Sprott 8996."

End of Diary quotation

EPILOGUE

It was difficult to believe that the war was over.

The hearts of the nation and even the minds had got accustomed to it, and I never realized before how easy it is for men's minds to form bad habits. Few of us live up to the blessings we are accustomed to, and it is rare to preserve freshness of outlook in daily life.

The men who started by saying the war would be over in a few months—and these included nearly all our Admirals, Generals and business men—ended by believing it would go on for ever, and took it as an insult if you dared to suggest it had already lasted too long. You were a Pacifist or a pro-German if you did not share their enthusiastic desire to march into Berlin.

I observed the sensibilities of my acquaintance visibly thicken during the Great War, and even to-day you will meet men and women in France, Belgium and England who say that the Armistice came too soon.

One can never guess who the people will be that think war wicked, that think it folly, or think it noble.

Women of no imagination, but a certain fancy, call it "glorious"; old men in Club windows say it is "inevitable"; and the young ones who stay at home boast that nothing but overwhelming Victory will ever satisfy their sense of honour. But, to quote my dear friend, Mr. Maguire*:

"It is easy to be a bloodhound on the hearth."

People say the same thing about the inevitability of war as they said about the inevitability of duelling and

* Mr. Rochfort Maguire.

with possibly as little reason. War is not glorious; it is futile and bestial. The training for it forces men to obey with wooden precision commands not only muddled and murderous, but which are against all their intelligence; nor can anyone believe to-day that there is such a thing as Victory. I will go a step further and say with confidence that, whatever war may have done for the dead, it has not improved the living. The cranks are crankier, the gamblers more extravagant, the back-biters more spiteful, the rich more alarmed, the poor more restless, the clergy more confused, and the Government more corrupt.

With the signing of the Armistice all thoughts turned to the Peace Treaty and the infinite complications it was likely to present to the three principal figures concerned.

Mr. Lloyd George's proved genius for handling men had not given him the time or opportunity necessary for studying foreign affairs; nor had he ever been a great traveller. The French language is at all times difficult for an Englishman, and International Law was not the strong point either of the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary, Mr. Wilson, or Monsieur Clemenceau. Reading and writing letters, the latter had often said to me, was an occupation that bored him. Geographical frontiers want either knowledge or study, and no American President, however eloquent, is qualified by his position to know much about European affairs. Nor was the vital problem of Finance a subject that either one or other of the three professed to know anything at all about.

When it was rumoured that neither our Foreign Office, War Office, nor Admiralty were to be represented at Versailles, we were interested to guess who the personnel would be; and, when it was known that no one versed in International Law or Finance had been approached, men of every Party and opinion besieged our house begging my husband to go to Paris. They said he must overlook all personal feeling and in such an emergency offer his

services to his country: that, having been Chancellor of the Exchequer, with an unrivalled knowledge of Law, and leader of one of the great political Parties, he had every right to be there as his counsel would prove invaluable in drawing up the Treaty of Peace.

All sorts of stories were current. Some said that, for reasons of a private character, Mr. Asquith refused to discuss politics with Mr. Lloyd George, and that at such a moment to think of oneself showed a pettiness inconceivable in a man of his quality.

These stories spread to the House of Commons and my husband told me that it had been repeated to him—with what accuracy he did not know—that Mr. Lloyd George had said that, in the event of any misfortune happening, Mr. Asquith would be largely responsible, as he had never taken the trouble to talk to him about the present situation.

On hearing this, my huband spoke to one of the Prime Minister's many henchmen and said he was ready and willing, should Mr. Lloyd George desire it, to speak to him at any time; and shortly after this—just before the General Election of December, 1918—Henry was asked to go to the Prime Minister's room in the House of Commons.

Upon his return he told me what had occurred. He had been received with a friendliness that amounted to enthusiasm and asked where he stood. Mr. Lloyd George then said:

"I understand you don't wish to take a post under the Government."

To which my husband answered that that was so; and added that the only service he thought he could render the Government would be if he were to go to Versailles, as from what he knew both of President Wilson and M. Clemenceau he was pretty sure they knew little of International Law or Finance, and that these two problems would be found all-important in view

of fixing future Frontiers and the havoc the war was likely to create in all the Foreign Exchanges.

At this Mr. Lloyd George looked a little confused. He was walking up and down the room, and in knocking up against a chair a pile of loose books were thrown upon the ground. Hastily looking at his watch and stooping down to pick up the books, he said he would consider my husband's proposal. Nothing more was said; the interview was over and my husband never heard another word upon the matter.

If the men who had fought the war had made the Peace, the name by which they were christened might have been appropriate; but, as it turned out, a more fantastic misnomer for President Wilson and the representatives of the other Allies could hardly have been conceived than the "Big Four."

Victory puts a greater strain on the behaviour of Nations and individuals than Failure; and you can take the measure of both, according to the way in which they bear it.

No British Prime Minister ever went abroad accompanied by wiser advisers than Mr. Lloyd George when he left England to make the Peace. He took, among others, a young man of genius in Mr. Maynard Keynes, every word of whose writing has come true. But the minds were loose, the ears deaf, and the heads swollen of those to whom he was talking, and the worst instead of the best qualities were developed at Versailles, and seen as clearly as flags flown from ships.

If any of the "Big Four" had had a vestige of greatness the world would not have witnessed the exhibition of Greed, Grab and Intrigue that reduced the Peace Conference to a Thieves' Kitchen. They might have taken for the sermon that they preached the text out of Isaiah:

"Yea, they are greedy dogs which can never have

enough, and they are shepherds that can never understand ; they all look to their own way, every one for his gain from his quarter."*

Two of the Nations that signed the Peace should hesitate before criticizing France either for her policy at Versailles or for her prejudices to-day.

America came into the war late and suffered the least. Great Britain is geographically so placed as to be in no danger from Germany (unless aeroplanes make much greater strides than they have yet done), and after her demands upon the enemy it would have been fatal for the prestige of any French Government to have asked for less. Neither of these countries can realize the nameless horrors, the losses in men, money, and material from which the French suffered by having the aggressor on their soil ; aggravated as they were by the memories of 1870.

Their military preparations before 1914 were not of such an alarming character as to make a single German believe that their intention was to attack them ; and the unnecessary brutalities of the enemy outside the exigencies of war—the deliberate laying waste of orchards, factories and farms, after they knew that they were defeated—will be hard for Frenchmen ever to forgive. It is in consequence of these brutalities that the natural but futile desire to profit at the enemy's expense is pursuing the nations of the world to-day.

The Coupon claptrap in our khaki election of " Hang the Kaiser ! " and " make the Germans pay the whole cost of the war " was quite as likely to deceive France as England. And, when one remembers the effect it produced upon our own people, it is obvious that the French were more than justified in believing that their unexcitable Ally meant business ; and being roused at last to a proper sense of their misfortunes was prepared to back them to the last man in the Ruhr, and on the Rhine.

* Isaiah 56, v. 11.

I have spoken to many thoughtful men, and am convinced that the Confidence Trick in the General Election of 1918 was played with even greater success upon the French than upon the British public, and you have only to look at the state of things in this country to see the results not only of the Election promises but of the mischievous decisions taken in consequence of them at a Treaty of Peace which everyone to-day is clamouring to change.

The Kaiser is not hanged; the German pockets have not been searched; the "land fit for heroes to live in" threatens to deport men by emigration, not in thousands, but in hundreds of thousands; millions of unemployed tramp the streets; the "Safeguarding of Industries Act"—which could be more accurately called "For the Prevention of the Recovery of Foreign Exchanges"—has not only increased the price of necessary articles, but hurts Lancashire and hampers scientific research; and the Coalition Candidates at every by-election vie with each other in disclaiming all connection with the Government.

It was the duty of the "Big Four" to help France instead of tempting her; to check the ambitions of little nations instead of inflaming them; and, above everything else, to make Peace.

The men who criticise Liberals for being lovers of Peace are called Loyalists, and believe in force. If their counsel had prevailed in the past we should have lost South Africa; in listening to them we see what Reprisals have made of Ireland, and if we are not careful we shall lose our good name all the world over.

Were these critics teachable, they would know that if you are sufficiently prepared for war you will certainly get it; and, if they doubt the truth of this, they will find no better object lesson than in the failure of a people like the Germans, who after long and scientific preparation were equipped in 1914 not only to conquer France, but the larger part of Europe.

No Minister could remain in office in this country if he suggested that outside our Navy we should keep an Army large enough to fight a foreign power, while ensuring sufficient trade to pay for both.

It was the duty of the "Big Four" to impress upon the world after such a catastrophe that the only means by which we—or any other nation—could be saved was by the co-operation of the victors and the vanquished alike, and to guide them into the paths of Peace.

The Conference darkened the waters like the cuttle-fish; and the British people, led by their Prime Minister, acquiesced in the decisions of Versailles with less excuse than any of the other countries and are blushing for it now.

Mr. Spender writes in a fine leading article:

"After three years of Peace it is brought home to practical men that nearly everything the Allies have attempted to do to their late enemies has been hurtful to themselves. Nothing less than a complete revision undertaken in a new spirit will bury old feuds and work for co-operation against dangers which threaten all Europe."

The spirit of war is the spirit of conquest or revenge, and both war and the preparation for it blur Vision as weeds choke growth. It is not in the interests of the enemy, but in the interests of France, of England, and of Europe that the Peace is universally damned to-day.

Ever since the days of Christ crowds clamour for the wrong person. If we had been nobly led into a clean Peace—to quote my husband—the American people might have backed the League of Nations; but we joined in the clamour for Barabbas. The League was difficult to shout, and wanted both Love and Faith to understand. The President, dazed by the deftness of the Paris Trinity, and diverted by the shouts of the crowd, lost sight of the silent Christ. He paused to distinguish

the names, and while he was listening his health broke, and he was repudiated by his own people.

. . . . . .

If Germany is not sufficiently punished for having equipped a vast army for an unprovoked war, the mills of God grind exceeding slow. It was pride in their progress that hardened the hearts and turned the heads of our enemy. Let the Allies be careful lest love of themselves or fear of the future does not turn theirs also.

There is only one antidote to vanity after Victory, and that is to remember God.

"In the days when the keepers of the house shall tremble and the strong men shall bow themselves . . . when they shall be afraid of that which is High, and fears shall be in the way. . . . For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil."

THE END.

MARGOT ASQUITH,

1922.

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